HISTORY

OF

ENGLISH LITERATURE

BY

H. A. TAINE, D. C. L.

IMPERIAL EDITION.

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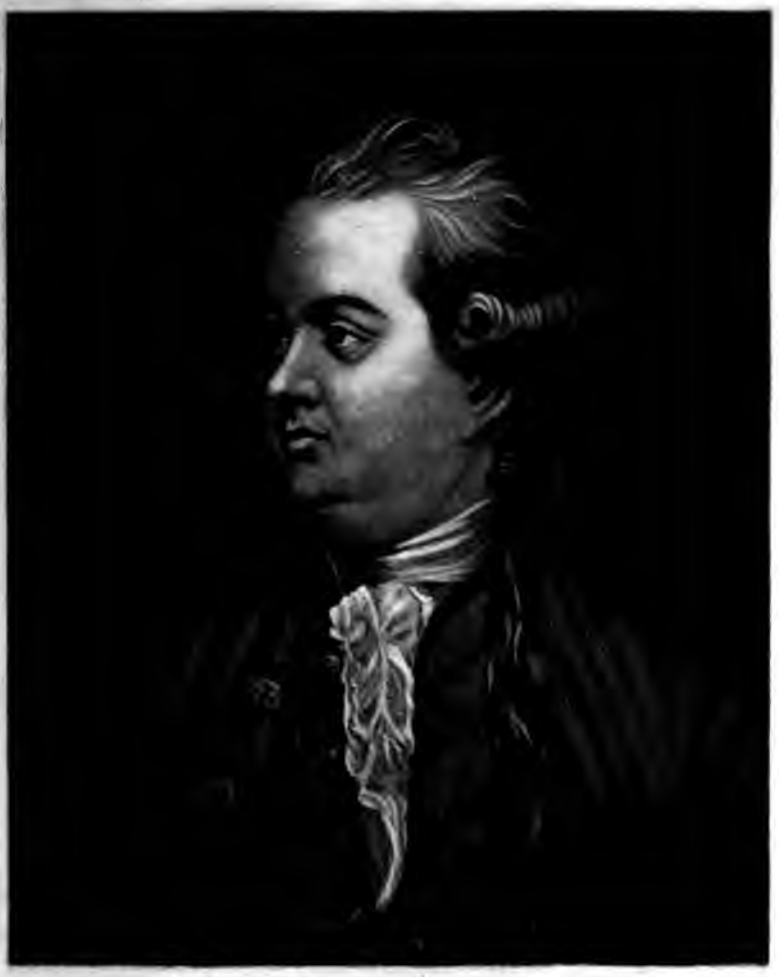

EDWARD GIBBON

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OF

ENGLISH LITERATURE

BY

H. A. TAINE, D. C. L.

TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH

BY

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One of the Masters at the Edinburgh Academy

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V.

Swift wrote the *Tale of a Tub* at Sir William Temple's, amidst all kind of reading, as an abstract of truth and science. Hence this tale is the satire of all science and all truth.

Of religion first. He seems here to defend the Church of England; but what church and what creed are not involved in his attack? To enliven his subject, he profanes and reduces questions of dogma to a question of clothes. A father had three sons, Peter, Martin, and Jack; he left each of them a coat at his death,[1] warning them to wear it clean and brush it often. The three brothers obeyed for some time and travelled sensibly, slaying "a reasonable quantity of giants and dragons."[2] Unfortunately, having come up to town, they adopted its manners, fell in love with several fashionable ladies, the Duchess d'Argent, Madame de Grands Titres, and the Countess d'Orgueil,[3] and to gain their favours, began to live as gallants, taking snuff, swearing, rhyming, and contracting debts, keeping horses, fighting duels, whoring, killing bailiffs. A sect was established who

"Held the universe to be a large suit of clothes, which invests everything: that the earth is invested by the air; the air is invested by the stars, and the stars are invested by the primum mobile. . . . What is that which some call land, but a fine coat faced with green? or the sea, but a waistcoat of water-tabby? . . . You will find how curious journeyman Nature has been, to trim up the vegetable beaux: observe how sparkish a periwig adorns the head of a beech, and what a fine doublet of

[1] Christian truth.

[2] Persecutions and contests of the primitive church.

[3] Covetousness, ambition, and pride; the three vices that the ancient fathers inveighed against.

white sattin is worn by the birch. . . . Is not religion a cloak; honesty a pair of shoes worn out in the dirt; self-love a surtout; vanity a shirt; and conscience a pair of breeches; which, though a cover for lewdness as well as nastiness, is easily slipt down for the service of both ? . . . If certain ermines and furs be placed in a certain position, we style them a judge; and so an apt conjunction of lawn and black sattin, we entitle a bishop." [1]

Others held also "that the soul was the outward, and the body the inward clothing. . . . This last they proved by Scripture, because in them we live, and move, and have our being." Thus our three brothers, having only very simple clothes, were embarrassed. For instance, the fashion at this time was for shoulder-knots,[2] and their father's will expressly forbade them to "add to or diminish from their coats one thread;

"In this unhappy case they went immediately to consult their father's will, read it over and over, but not a word of the shoulder-knot. . . . After much thought, one of the brothers, who happened to be more book-learned than the other two, said, he had found an expedient. 'It is true,' said he, 'there is nothing in this will, *totidem verbis*, making mention of Shoulder-Knots; but I dare conjecture, we may find them inclusive, or *totidem syllabis*.' This distinction was immediately approved by all; and so they fell again to examine; [3] but their evil star had so directed the matter, that the first syllable was not to be found in the whole writings. Upon which disappointment, he, who found the former evasion, took heart and said: Brothers, there are yet hopes, for though we cannot find them *totidem verbis*, nor *totidem syllabis*, I dare engage we shall make them out *tertio modo* or *totidem litteris*." This discovery was also highly commended; upon which they fell once more to the

[1] *A Tale of a Tub*, xi. sec. 2, 79, 81. [2] Innovations. [3] The Will.

scrutiny, and picked out S, H, O, U, L, D, E, R; when the same planet, enemy to their repose, had wonderfully contrived that a K was not to be found. Here was a weighty difficulty; but the distinguishing brother . . . now his hand was in, proved by a very good argument, that K was a modern illegitimate letter, unknown to the learned ages, nor anywhere to be found in ancient manuscripts. . . . Upon this all farther difficulty vanished; shoulder-knots were made clearly out to be *jure paterno*, and our three gentlemen swaggered with as large and flaunting ones as the best."[1]

Other interpretations admitted gold lace, and a codicil authorised flame coloured satin linings:[2]

"Next winter a player, hired for the purpose by the corporation of fringemakers, acted his part in a new comedy, all covered with silver fringe, and according to the laudable custom gave rise to that fashion. Upon which the brothers consulting their father's will, to their great astonishment found these words: "Item, I charge and command my said three sons to wear no sort of silver-fringe upon or about their said coats," etc. . . . However, after some pause, the brother so often mentioned for his erudition, who was well skilled in criticisms, had found in a certain author, which he said should be nameless, that the same word, which in the will is called fringe, does also signify a broomstick: and doubtless ought to have the same interpretation in this paragraph. This another of the brothers disliked, because of that epithet silver, which could not, he humbly conceived, in propriety of speech, be reasonably applied to a broomstick; but it was replied upon him that this epithet was understood in a mythological and allegorical sense. However, he objected again, why their father should forbid them to wear a broomstick on their coats, a caution that seemed unnatural and impertinent; upon which he was taken up short, as one who spoke irreverently of a mystery, which doubtless was very useful and significant, but ought not to be over-curiously pried into, or nicely reasoned upon."[3]

[1] *A Tale of a Tub*, xi. sec. 2, 83. [2] Purgatory.
[3] *A Tale of a Tub*, 88.

In the end the scholastic brother grew weary of searching further "evasions," locked up the old will in a strong box,[1] authorised by tradition the fashions which became him, and having contrived to be left a legacy, styled himself My Lord Peter. His brothers, treated like servants, were discarded from his house; they reopened the will of their father, and began to understand it. Martin (Luther), to reduce his clothes to the primitive simplicity, brought off a large handful of points, stripped away ten dozen yards of fringe, rid his coat of a huge quantity of gold-lace, but kept a few embroideries, which could not "be got away without damaging the cloth." Jack (Calvin) tore off all in his enthusiasm, and was found in tatters, besides being envious of Martin, and half mad. He then joined the Æolists, or inspired admirers of the wind, who pretend that the spirit, or breath, or wind, is heavenly, and contains all knowledge:

"First, it is generally affirmed or confessed that learning puffeth men up; and secondly they proved it by the following syllogism: words are but wind; and learning is nothing but words; ergo learning is nothing but wind.... This, when blown up to its perfection, ought not to be covetously hoarded up, stifled, or hid under a bushel, but freely communicated to mankind. Upon these reasons, and others of equal weight, the wise Æolists affirm the gift of belching to be the noblest act of a rational creature.... At certain seasons of the year, you might behold the priests among them in vast number ... linked together in a circular chain, with every man a pair of bellows applied to his neighbour's breech, by which they blew each other to the shape and size of a tun; and for that reason with great propriety of speech, did usually call their bodies their vessels."[2]

[1] The prohibition of the laity's reading the Scriptures.
[2] *A Tale of a Tub*, sec. 8, 146.

After this explanation of theology, religious quarrels, and mystical inspirations, what is left, even of the Anglican Church? She is a sensible, useful, political cloak, but what else? Like a stiff brush used with too strong a hand, the buffoonery has carried away the cloth as well as the stain. Swift has put out a fire, I allow; but, like Gulliver at Lilliput, the people saved by him must hold their nose, to admire the right application of the liquid, and the energy of the engine that saves them.

Religion being drowned, Swift turns against science; for the digressions with which he interrupts his story to imitate and mock the modern sages are most closely connected with his tale. The book opens with introductions, prefaces, dedications, and other appendices generally employed to swell books—violent caricatures heaped up against the vanity and prolixity of authors. He professes himself one of them, and announces their discoveries. Admirable discoveries! The first of their commentaries will be on

"*Tom Thumb*, whose author was a Pythagorean philosopher. This dark treatise contains the whole scheme of the Metempsychosis, deducing the progress of the soul through all her stages. *Whittington and his Cat* is the work of that mysterious rabbi Jehuda Hannasi, containing a defence of the gemara of the Jerusalem misna, and its just preference to that of Babylon, contrary to the vulgar opinion.[1]"

He himself announces that he is going to publish "A Panegyrical Essay upon the Number Three; a General History of Ears; a Modest Defence of the Proceedings of the Rabble in all Ages; an Essay on the Art of Canting, philosophically, physically, and

[1] *A Tale of a Tub*, Introduction, 72.

musically considered;" and he engages his readers to try by their entreaties to get from him these treatises, which will change the appearance of the world. Then, turning against the philosophers and the critics, sifters of texts, he proves to them, according to their own fashion, that the ancients mentioned them. Can we find anywhere a more biting parody on forced interpretations:

"The types are so apposite and the applications so necessary and natural, that it is not easy to conceive how any reader of a modern eye or taste could overlook them. . . . For first; Pausanias is of opinion, that the perfection of writing correct was entirely owing to the institution of critics; and, that he can possibly mean no other than the true critic, is, I think, manifest enough from the following description. He says, they were a race of men, who delighted to nibble at the superfluities and excrescences of books; which the learned at length observing, took warning, of their own accord, to lop the luxuriant, the rotten, the dead, the sapless, and the overgrown branches from their works. But now, all this he cunningly shades under the following allegory; that the Nauplians in Argos learned the art of pruning their vines, by observing that when an ASS had browsed upon one of them, it thrived the better and bore fairer fruits. But Herodotus, holding the very same hieroglyph, speaks much plainer, and almost in *terminis*. He has been so bold as to tax the true critics of ignorance and malice; telling us openly, for I think nothing can be plainer, that in the western part of Libya there were ASSES with horns."[1]

Then follow a multitude of pitiless sarcasms. Swift has the genius of insult; he is an inventor of irony, as Shakspeare of poetry; and as beseems an extreme force, he goes to extremes in his thought and art.

[1] *A Tale of a Tub*, sec. 3; *A Digression concerning Critics*, 97.

He lashes reason after science, and leaves nothing of the whole human mind. With a medical seriousness he establishes that vapours are exhaled from the whole body, which, "getting possession of the brain," leave it healthy if they are not abundant, but excite it if they are; that in the first case they make peaceful individuals, in the second great politicians, founders of religions, and deep philosophers, that is, madmen, so that madness is the source of all human genius and all the institutions of the universe. This is why it is very wrong to keep men shut up in Bedlam, and a commission appointed to examine them would find in this academy many imprisoned geniuses "which might produce admirable instruments for the several offices in a state ecclesiastical, civil, and military."

"Is any student tearing his straw in piece-meal, swearing and blaspheming, biting his grate, foaming at the mouth? . . . let the right worshipful commissioners of inspection give him a regiment of dragoons, and send him into Flanders among the rest. . . . You will find a third gravely taking the dimensions of his kennel; a person of foresight and insight, though kept quite in the dark. . . . He walks duly in one pace. . . . talks much of hard times and taxes and the whore of Babylon; bars up the wooden window of his cell constantly at eight o'clock, dreams of fire. . . . Now what a figure would all those acquirements amount to if the owner were sent into the city among his brethren? . . . Now is it not amazing to think the society of Warwick-lane should have no more concern for the recovery of so useful a member? . . . I shall not descend so minutely, as to insist upon the vast number of beaux, fiddlers, poets, and politicians that the world might recover by such a reformation. . . . Even I myself, the author of these momentous truths, am a person whose imaginations are hard-mouthed, and exceedingly disposed to run away with his reason, which I have observed, from long

experience, to be a very light rider, and easily shaken off; upon which account my friends will never trust me alone, without a solemn promise to vent my speculations in this, or the like manner, for the universal benefit of mankind."[1]

What a wretched man is he who knows himself and mocks himself! What madman's laughter, and what a sob in this hoarse gaiety! What remains for him but to slaughter the remainder of human invention? Who does not see here the despair from which sprang the academy of Lagado? Is there not here a foretaste of madness in this intense meditation of absurdity? His mathematician, who, to teach geometry, makes his pupils swallow wafers on which he writes his theorems; his moralist, who, to reconcile political parties, proposes to saw off the occiput and brain of each "opposite party-man," and "to let the occiputs thus cut off be interchanged;" his economist again, who tries "to reduce human excrement to its original food." Swift is akin to these, and is the most wretched of all, because he nourishes his mind, like them, on filth and folly, and because he possesses what they have not, knowledge and disgust.

It is sad to exhibit human folly, it is sadder to exhibit human perversity: the heart is more a part of ourselves than reason: we suffer less in seeing extravagance and folly than wickedness or baseness, and I find Swift more agreeable in his *Tale of a Tub* than in *Gulliver*.

All his talent and all his passions are assembled in this book; the positive mind has impressed upon it its form and force. There is nothing agreeable in the fiction or the style. It is the diary of an ordinary man, a surgeon, then a captain, who describes coolly

[1] *A Tale of a Tub; A Digression concerning Madness*, sec. 11, 167.

and sensibly the events and objects which he has just seen, but who has no feeling for the beautiful, no appearance of admiration or passion, no delivery. Sir Joseph Banks and Captain Cook relate thus. Swift only seeks the natural, and he attains it. His art consists in taking an absurd supposition, and deducing seriously the effects which it produces. It is the logical and technical mind of a mechanician, who, imagining the decrease or increase in a wheelwork, perceives the result of the changes, and writes down the record. His whole pleasure is in seeing these results clearly, and by a solid reasoning. He marks the dimensions, and so forth, like a good engineer and a statistician, omitting no trivial and positive detail, explaining cookery, stabling, politics: in this he has no equal but De Foe. The loadstone machine which sustains the flying island, the entrance of Gulliver into Lilliput, and the inventory of his property, his arrival and maintenance among the Yahoos, carry us with them; no mind knew better the ordinary laws of nature and human life; no mind shut itself up more strictly in this knowledge; none was ever more exact or more limited.

But what a vehemence underneath this aridity! How ridiculous our interests and passions seem, degraded to the littleness of Lilliput, or compared to the vastness of Brobdingnag? What is beauty, when the handsomest body, seen with piercing eyes, seems horrible? What is our power, when an insect, king of an ant-hill, can be called, like our princes, "sublime majesty, delight and terror of the universe?" What is our homage worth, when a pigmy "is taller, by almost the breadth of a nail, than any of his court, which alone is enough to strike an awe into his beholders?" Three-fourths of

our sentiment are follies, and the weakness of our organs is the only cause of our veneration or love.

Society repels us still more than man. At Laputa, at Lilliput, amongst the horses and giants, Swift rages against it, and is never tired of abusing and reviling it. In his eyes, "ignorance, idleness, and vice are the proper ingredients for qualifying a legislator; laws are best explained, interpreted, and applied by those whose interest and abilities lie in perverting, confounding, and eluding them."[1] A noble is a wretch, corrupted body and soul, "combining in himself all the diseases and vices transmitted by ten generations of rakes and rascals. A lawyer is a hired liar, wont by twenty years of roguery to pervert the truth if he is an advocate, and to sell it if he is a judge. A minister of state is a go-between, who, having disposed of his wife," or brawled for the public good, is master of all offices; and who, in order better to rob the money of the nation, buys members of the House of Commons with the same money. A King is a practiser of all the vices, unable to employ or love an honest man, persuaded that "the royal throne could not be supported without corruption, because that positive, confident, restive temper, which virtue infused into a man, was a perpetual clog to public business."[2] At Lilliput the king chooses as his ministers those who dance best upon the tight-rope. At Luggnagg he compels all those, who are presented to him, to crawl on their bellies and lick the dust.

"When the king has a mind to put any of his nobles to death in a gentle, indulgent manner, he commands the floor to be strewed with a certain brown powder of a deadly composition,

[1] Swift's Works, xii. *Gulliver's Travels*, Part 2, ch. 6, p. 171.
[2] *Gulliver's Travels*, Part 3, ch. 8, p. 258.

which, being licked up, infallibly kills him in twenty-four hours. But in justice to this prince's great clemency, and the care he has of his subjects' lives (wherein it were much to be wished that the monarchs of Europe would imitate him), it must be mentioned for his honour, that strict orders are given to have the infected parts of the floor well washed after every such execution. . . . I myself heard him give directions that one of his pages should be whipped, whose turn it was to give notice about washing the floor after an execution, but maliciously had omitted it; by which neglect, a young lord of great hopes coming to an audience, was unfortunately poisoned, although the King at that time had no design against his life. But this good prince was so gracious as to forgive the poor page his whipping, upon promise that he would do so no more, without special orders." [1]

All these fictions of giants, pigmies, flying islands, are means for depriving human nature of the veils with which habit and imagination cover it, to display it in its truth and its ugliness. There is still one cloak to remove, the most deceitful and familiar. Swift must take away that appearance of reason in which we deck ourselves. He must suppress the sciences, arts, combinations of societies, inventions of industries, whose brightness dazzles us. He must discover the Yahoo in man. What a spectacle!

"At last I beheld several animals in a field, and one or two of the same kind sitting in trees. Their shape was very singular and deformed. . . . Their heads and breasts were covered with a thick hair, some frizzled, and others lank; they had beards like goats, and a long ridge of hair down their backs, and the forepart of their legs and feet; but the rest of their bodies was bare, so that I might see their skins, which were of a brown

[1] *Gulliver's Travels*, Part 3, ch. 9, p. 264.

buff colour. . . . They climbed high trees as nimbly as a squirrel, for they had strong extended claws before and behind, terminating in sharp points and hooked. . . . The females . . . had long lank hair on their head, but none on their faces, nor anything more than a sort of down on the rest of their bodies. . . . Upon the whole I never beheld in all my travels so disagreeable an animal, or one against which I naturally conceived so great an antipathy."[1]

According to Swift, such are our brothers. He finds in them all our instincts. They hate each other, tear each other with their talons, with hideous contortions and yells! such is the source of our quarrels. If they find a dead cow, although they are but five, and there is enough for fifty, they strangle and wound each other: such is a picture of our greed and our wars. They dig up precious stones and hide them in their kennels, and watch them "with great caution," pining and howling when robbed: such is the origin of our love of gold. They devour indifferently "herbs, berries, roots, the corrupted flesh of animals," preferring "what they could get by rapine or stealth," gorging themselves till they vomit or burst; such is the portrait of our gluttony and injustice. They have a kind of juicy and unwholesome root, which they "would suck with great delight," till they "howl, and grin, and chatter," embracing or scratching each other, then reeling, hiccuping, wallowing in the mud: such is a picture of our drunkenness.

"In most herds there was a sort of ruling Yahoo, who was always more deformed in body, and mischievous in disposition, than any of the rest: that this leader had usually a favourite as like himself as he could get, whose employment was to lick his master's feet, . . . and drive the female Yahoos to his

[1] *Gulliver's Travels*, Part 4, ch. 1, p. 286.

kennel; for which he was now and then rewarded with a piece of ass's flesh. . . . He usually continues in office till a worse can be found."[1]

Such is an abstract of our government. And yet he gives preference to the Yahoos over men, saying that our wretched reason has aggravated and multiplied these vices, and concluding with the king of Brobdingnag that our species is "the most pernicious race of little odious vermin that nature ever suffered to crawl upon the surface of the earth."[2]

Five years after this treatise on man, he wrote in favour of unhappy Ireland a pamphlet which is like the last effort of his despair and his genius.[3] I give it almost whole; it deserves it. I know nothing like it in any literature:

"It is a melancholy object to those who walk through this great town, or travel in the country, when they see the streets, the roads, and cabin-doors crowded with beggars of the female sex, followed by three, four, or six children, all in rags, and importuning every passenger for an alms. . . . I think it is agreed by all parties that this prodigious number of children . . . is, in the present deplorable state of the kingdom, a very great additional grievance; and therefore, whoever could find out a fair, cheap, and easy method of making these children sound, useful members of the Commonwealth, would deserve so well of the public, as to have his statue set up for a preserver of the nation. . . . I shall now, therefore, humbly propose my own thoughts, which I hope will not be liable to the least objection."[4]

[1] *Gulliver's Travels*, Part 4, ch. 7, p. 337.

[2] *Ibid.* Part 2, ch. 6, p. 172.

[3] *A Modest Proposal for preventing the children of the poor people in Ireland from being a burden to their parents or country, and for making them beneficial to the public*, 1729.

[4] *Ibid.* vii. 454.

When we know Swift, such a beginning frightens us:

"I have been assured by a very knowing American of my acquaintance in London, that a young healthy child, well nursed, is, at a year old, a most delicious, nourishing, and wholesome food, whether stewed, roasted, baked, or boiled; and I make no doubt that it will equally serve in a fricassee or a ragout.

"I do therefore humbly offer it to public consideration, that of the hundred and twenty thousand children already computed, twenty thousand may be reserved for breed, whereof only one-fourth part to be males; . . . that the remaining hundred thousand may, at a year old, be offered in sale to the persons of quality and fortune through the kingdom; always advising the mother to let them suck plentifully in the last month, so as to render them plump and fat for a good table. A child will make two dishes at an entertainment for friends, and when the family dines alone, the fore or hind quarter will make a reasonable dish, and seasoned with a little pepper or salt, will be very good boiled on the fourth day, especially in winter."

"I have reckoned, upon a medium, that a child just born will weigh twelve pounds, and in a solar year, if tolerably nursed, will increase to twenty-eight pounds.

"I have already computed the charge of nursing a beggar's child (in which list I reckon all cottagers, labourers, and four-fifths of the farmers), to be about two shillings per annum, rags included; and I believe no gentleman would repine to give ten shillings for the carcass of a good fat child, which, as I have said, will make four dishes of excellent nutritive meat.

"Those who are more thrifty (as I must confess the times require), may flay the carcass; the skin of which, artificially dressed, will make admirable gloves for ladies, and summer boots for fine gentlemen.

"As to our city of Dublin, shambles may be appointed for this purpose in the most convenient parts of it; and butchers we may be assured will not be wanting; although I rather

recommend buying the children alive, than dressing them hot from the knife, as we do roasting pigs. . . .

"I think the advantages by the proposal which I have made, are obvious and many, as well as of the highest importance. For first, as I have already observed, it would greatly lessen the number of Papists, with whom we are yearly overrun, being the principal breeders of the nation, as well as our most dangerous enemies. . . . Thirdly, whereas the maintenance of a hundred thousand children, from two years old and upward, cannot be computed at less than ten shillings a piece per annum, the nation's stock will be thereby increased fifty thousand pounds per annum, beside the profit of a new dish introduced to the tables of all gentlemen of fortune in the kingdom, who have any refinement in taste. And the money will circulate among ourselves, the goods being entirely of our own growth and manufacture. . . . Sixthly, this would be a great inducement to marriage, which all wise nations have either encouraged by rewards, or enforced by laws and penalties. It would increase the care and tenderness of mothers toward their children, when they were sure of a settlement for life to the poor babes, provided in some sort by the public, to their annual profit or expense. . . . Many other advantages might be enumerated, for instance, the addition of some thousand carcasses in our exportation of barrelled beef; the propagation of swine's flesh, and the improvement in the art of making good bacon. . . . But this, and many others, I omit, being studious of brevity.

"Some persons of desponding spirit are in great concern about that vast number of poor people who are aged, diseased, or maimed; and I have been desired to employ my thoughts, what course may be taken to ease the nation of so grievous an encumbrance. But I am not in the least pain upon that matter; because it is very well known, that they are every day dying and rotting, by cold and famine, and filth and vermin, as fast as can be reasonably expected. And as to the young labourers, they are now in almost as hopeful a condition; they cannot get

work, and consequently pine away for want of nourishment, to a degree, that, if at any time they are accidentally hired to common labour, they have not strength to perform it; and thus the country and themselves are happily delivered from the evils to come.[1]

Swift ends with the following ironic lines, worthy of a cannibal:

"I profess, in the sincerity of my heart that I have not the least personal interest in endeavouring to promote this necessary work, having no other motive than the public good of my country, by advancing our trade, providing for infants, relieving the poor, and giving some pleasure to the rich. I have no children by which I can propose to get a single penny; the youngest being nine years old and my wife past child-bearing."[2]

Much has been said of unhappy great men, Pascal, for instance. I think that his cries and his anguish are faint compared to this calm treatise.

Such was this great and unhappy genius, the greatest of the classical age, the most unhappy in history, English throughout, whom the excess of his English qualities inspired and consumed, having this intensity of desires, which is the main feature of the race, the enormity of pride which the habit of liberty, command, and success has impressed upon the nation, the solidity of the positive mind which habits of business have established in the country; precluded from power and action by his unchecked passions and his intractable pride; excluded from poetry and philosophy by the clear-sightedness and narrowness of his common sense; deprived of the consolations offered by contemplative life, and the occupation furnished by practical life; too superior to

[1] *A Modest Proposal*, etc., 461. [2] *Ibid.* 466.

embrace heartily a religious sect or a political party, too narrow-minded to rest in the lofty doctrines which conciliate all beliefs, or in the wide sympathies which embrace all parties; condemned by his nature and surroundings to fight without loving a cause, to write without taking a liking to literature, to think without feeling the truth of any dogma, warring as a condottiere against all parties, a misanthrope disliking all men, a sceptic denying all beauty and truth. But these very surroundings, and this very nature, which expelled him from happiness, love, power, and science, raised him, in this age of French imitation and classical moderation, to a wonderful height, where, by the originality and power of his inventions, he is the equal of Byron, Milton, and Shakspeare, and shows pre-eminently the character and mind of his nation. Sensibility, a positive mind, and pride, forged for him a unique style, of terrible vehemence, withering calmness, practical effectiveness, hardened by scorn, truth and hatred, a weapon of vengeance and war which made his enemies cry out and die under its point and its poison. A pamphleteer against opposition and government, he tore or crushed his adversaries with his irony or his sentences, with the tone of a judge, a sovereign, and a hangman. A man of the world and a poet, he invented a cruel pleasantry, funereal laughter, a convulsive gaiety of bitter contrasts; and whilst dragging the mythological trappings, as if it were rags he was obliged to wear, he created a personal poetry by painting the crude details of trivial life, by the energy of a painful grotesqueness, by the merciless revelation of the filth we conceal. A philosopher against all philosophy, he created a realistic poem, a grave parody, deduced like geometry, absurd as

a dream, credible as a law report, attractive as a tale, degrading as a dishclout placed like a crown on the head of a divinity. These were his miseries and his strength: we quit such a spectacle with a sad heart, but full of admiration; and we say that a palace is beautiful even when it is on fire. Artists will add: especially when it is on fire.

CHAPTER VI.

The Novelists.

I.

AMIDST these finished and perfect writings a new kind makes its appearance, suited to the public tendencies and circumstances of the time, the anti-romantic novel, the work and the reading of positive minds, observers and moralists, not intended to exalt and amuse the imagination, like the novels of Spain and the middle ages, not to reproduce or embellish conversation, like the novels of France and the seventeenth century, but to depict real life, to describe characters, to suggest plans of conduct, and judge motives of action. It was a strange apparition, and like the voice of a people buried underground, when, amidst the splendid corruption of high life, this severe emanation of the middle class welled up, and when the obscenities of Mrs. Aphra Behn, still the diversion of ladies of fashion, were found on the same table with De Foe's *Robinson Crusoe*.

II.

De Foe, a dissenter, a pamphleteer, a journalist, a novel-writer, successively a hosier, a tile-maker, an accountant, was one of those indefatigable labourers and obstinate combatants, who, ill-treated, calumniated, imprisoned, succeeded by their uprightness, common

sense, and energy, in gaining England over to their side. At twenty-three, having taken arms for Monmouth, he was fortunate in not being hung or sent out of the country. Seven years later he was ruined and obliged to hide. In 1702, for a pamphlet not rightly understood, he was condemned to pay a fine, was set in the pillory, imprisoned two years in Newgate, and only the charity of Godolphin prevented his wife and six children from dying of hunger. Being released and sent as a commissioner to Scotland to treat about the union of the two countries, he narrowly escaped being stoned. Another pamphlet, which was again misconstrued, sent him to prison, compelled him to pay a fine of eight hundred pounds, and only just in time he received the Queen's pardon. His works were copied, he was robbed, and slandered. He was obliged to protest against the plagiarists, who printed and altered his works for their benefit; against the neglect of the Whigs, who did not find him tractable enough; against the animosity of the Tories, who saw in him the chief champion of the Whigs. In the midst of his self-defence he was struck with apoplexy, and continued to defend himself from his bed. Yet he lived on, but with great difficulty; poor and burdened with a family, he turned, at fifty-five, to fiction, and wrote successively *Moll Flanders*, *Captain Singleton*, *Duncan Campbell*, *Colonel Jack*, the *History of the Great Plague in London*, and many others. This vein exhausted, he diverged and tried another—the *Complete English Tradesman*, *A Tour through Great Britain*. Death came; poverty remained. In vain had he written in prose, in verse, on all subjects political and religious, accidental or moral, satires and novels, histories and poems, travels and pamphlets, commercial

essays and statistical information, in all two hundred and ten works, not of verbiage, but of arguments, documents, and facts, crowded and piled one upon another with such prodigality, that the memory, thought, and application of one man seemed too small for such a labour; he died penniless, in debt. However we regard his life, we see only prolonged efforts and persecutions. Joy seems to be wanting; the idea of the beautiful never enters. When he comes to fiction, it is like a Presbyterian and a plebeian, with low subjects and moral aims, to treat of the adventures, and reform the conduct of thieves and prostitutes, workmen and sailors. His whole delight was to think that he had a service to perform and that he was performing it: "He that opposes his own judgment against the current of the times ought to be backed with unanswerable truth; and he that has truth on his side is a fool as well as a coward if he is afraid to own it, because of the multitude of other men's opinions. 'Tis hard for a man to say, all the world is mistaken but himself. But if it be so, who can help it?" Nobody can help it, but then a man must walk straight ahead, and alone, amidst blows and throwing of mud. De Foe is like one of those brave, obscure, and useful soldiers who, with empty belly and burdened shoulders, go through their duties with their feet in the mud, pocket blows, receive the whole day long the fire of the enemy, and sometimes that of their friends into the bargain, and die sergeants, happy if it has been their good fortune to get hold of the legion of honour.

De Foe had the kind of mind suitable to such a hard service, solid, exact, entirely destitute of refinement,

enthusiasm, agreeableness.[1] His imagination was that of a man of business, not of an artist, crammed and, as it were, jammed down with facts. He tells them as they come to him, without arrangement or style, like a conversation, without dreaming of producing an effect, or composing a phrase, employing technical terms and vulgar forms, repeating himself at need, using the same thing two or three times, not seeming to imagine that there are methods of amusing, touching, engrossing, or pleasing, with no desire but to pour out on paper the fulness of the information with which he is charged. Even in fiction his information is as precise as in history. He gives dates, year, month, and day; notes the wind, north-east, south-west, north-west; he writes a log-book, an invoice, attorneys' and shopkeepers' bills, the number of moidores, interest, specie payments, payments in kind, cost and sale prices, the share of the king, of religious houses, partners, brokers, net totals, statistics, the geography and hydrography of the island, so that the reader is tempted to take an atlas and draw for himself a little map of the place, to enter into all the details of the history, and to see the objects as clearly and fully as the author. It seems as though our author had performed all Crusoe's labours, so exactly does he describe them, with numbers, quantities, dimensions, like a carpenter, potter, or an old tar. Never was such a sense of the real before or since. Our realists of to-day, painters, anatomists, who enter deliberately on their business, are very far from this naturalness; art and calculation crop out amidst their too minute descriptions. De Foe creates illusion; for it is not the eye which deceives us,

[1] See his dull poems, amongst others *Jure divino*, a poem in twelve books, in defence of every man's birthright by nature.

but the mind, and that literally: his account of the great plague has more than once passed for true; and Lord Chatham mistook his *Memoirs of a Cavalier* for an authentic narrative. This was his aim. In the preface to the old edition of *Robinson Crusoe* it is said: "The story is told . . . to the instruction of others by this example, and to justify and honour the wisdom of Providence. The editor believes the thing to be a just history of facts; neither is there any appearance of fiction in it." All his talents lie in this, and thus even his imperfections aid him; his lack of art becomes a profound art; his negligence, repetitions, prolixity, contribute to the illusion: we cannot imagine that such and such a detail, so minute, so dull, is invented; an inventor would have suppressed it; it is too tedious to have been put in on purpose: art chooses, embellishes, interests; art, therefore, cannot have piled up this heap of dull and vulgar accidents; it is the truth.

Read, for instance, *A True Relation of the Apparition of one Mrs. Veal, the next Day after her Death, to one Mrs. Bargrave, at Canterbury, the* 8*th of September* 1705; *which Apparition recommends the perusal of Drelincourt's Book of Consolation against the Fear of Death.*[1] The old little chap books, read by aged needlewomen, are not more monotonous. There is such an array of circumstantial and guaranteed details, such a file of witnesses quoted, referred to, registered, compared, such a perfect appearance of tradesman-like honesty, plain, vulgar common sense, that a man would take the author for an honest retired hosier, with too little brains to invent a story; no writer careful of his

[1] Compare another story of an apparition, Edgar Poe's *Case of M. Waldemar*. The American is a suffering artist; De Foe a citizen, who has common sense.

reputation would have printed such nonsense. In fact, it was not his reputation that De Foe cared for; he had other motives in his head; we literary men of the present time cannot guess them, being literary men only. But he wanted to sell a pious book of Drelincourt, which would not sell of itself, and in addition, to confirm people in their religious belief by advocating the appearance of ghosts. It was the grand proof then brought to bear on sceptics. Grave Dr. Johnson himself tried to see a ghost, and no event of that time was more suited to the belief of the middle class. Here, as elsewhere, De Foe, like Swift, is a man of action; effect, not noise touches him; he composed *Robinson Crusoe* to warn the impious, as Swift wrote the life of the last man hung to inspire thieves with terror! In that positive and religious age, amidst these political and puritanic citizens, practice was of such importance as to reduce art to the condition of its tool.

Never was art the tool of a more moral or more thoroughly English work. Robinson Crusoe is quite a man of his race, and might instruct it even in the present day. He has that force of will, inner enthusiasm, hidden ferment of a violent imagination which formerly produced the sea-kings, and now produces emigrants and squatters. The misfortunes of his two brothers, the tears of his relatives, the advice of his friends, the remonstrances of his reason, the remorse of his conscience, are all unable to restrain him: there was "a something fatal in his nature;" he had conceived the idea, he must go to sea. To no purpose is he seized with repentance during the first storm; he drowns in punch these "fits" of conscience. To no purpose is he warned by shipwreck and a narrow escape from death; he is

hardened, and grows obstinate. To no purpose captivity among the Moors and the possession of a fruitful plantation invite repose; the indomitable instinct returns; he was born to be his own destroyer, and embarks again. The ship goes down; he is cast alone on a desert island; then his native energy found its vent and its employment; like his descendants, the pioneers of Australia and America, he must recreate and re-master one by one the inventions and acquisitions of human industry; one by one he does so. Nothing represses his effort; neither possession nor weariness:

"I had the biggest magazine of all kinds now that ever was laid up, I believe, for one man; but I was not satisfied still; for, while the ship sat upright in that posture, I thought I ought to get everything out of her that I could. . . . I got most of the pieces of cable ashore, and some of the iron, though with infinite labour; for I was fain to dip for it into the water; a work which fatigued me very much. . . . I believe, verily, had the calm weather held, I should have brought away the whole ship, piece by piece." [1]

In his eyes, work is natural. When, in order "to barricade himself, he goes to cut the piles in the woods, and drives them into the earth, which cost a great deal of time and labour," he says: "A very laborious and tedious work. But what need I have been concerned at the tediousness of anything I had to do, seeing I had time enough to do it in? . . . My time or labour was little worth, and so it was as well employed one way as another." [2] Application and fatigue of head and arms give occupation to his superfluous activity and force; the mill-stone must find grist to grind, without

[1] De Foe's Works, 20 vols., 1819-21. *The Life and Adventures of Robinson Crusoe*, i. ch. iv. 65. [2] *Ibid.* 76.

which, turning round empty, it would wear itself away. He works, therefore, all day and night, at once carpenter, oarsman, porter, hunter, tiller of the ground, potter, tailor, milkman, basketmaker, grinder, baker, invincible in difficulties, disappointments, expenditure of time and toil. Having but a hatchet and an adze, it took him forty-two days to make a board. He occupied two months in making his first two jars; five months in making his first boat; then, "by dint of hard labour," he levelled the ground from his timber-yard to the sea, then, not being able to bring his boat to the sea, he tried to bring the sea up to his boat, and began to dig a canal; then, reckoning that he would require ten or twelve years to finish the task, he builds another boat at another place, with another canal half-a-mile long, four feet deep, six wide. He spends two years over it: "I bore with this. . . . I went through that by dint of hard labour. . . . Many a weary stroke it had cost. . . . This will testify that I was not idle. . . . As I had learned not to despair of anything. I never grudged my labour." These strong expressions of indomitable patience are ever recurring. These stout-hearted men are framed for labour, as their sheep are for slaughter and their horses for racing. Even now we may hear their mighty hatchet and pickaxe sounding in the claims of Melbourne and in the log-houses of the Salt Lake. The reason of their success is the same there as here; they do everything with calculation and method; they rationalise their energy, which is like a torrent they make a canal for. Crusoe sets to work only after deliberate calculation and reflection. When he seeks a spot for his tent, he enumerates the four conditions of the place he requires. When he wishes to escape despair, he draws

up impartially, "like debtor and creditor," the list of his advantages and disadvantages, putting them in two columns, active and passive, item for item, so that the balance is in his favour. His courage is only the servant of his common sense: "By stating and squaring everything by reason, and by making the most rational judgment of things, every man may be in time master of every mechanic art. I had never handled a tool in my life, and yet in time, by labour, application, and contrivance, I found at last that I wanted nothing but I could have made it, especially if I had had tools."[1] There is a grave and deep pleasure in this painful success, and in this personal acquisition. The squatter, like Crusoe, takes pleasure in things, not only because they are useful, but because they are his work. He feels himself a man, whilst finding everywhere about him the sign of his labour and thought; he is pleased: "I had everything so ready at my hand, that it was a great pleasure to me to see all my goods in such order, and especially to find my stock of all necessaries so great."[2] He returns to his home willingly, because he is there a master and creator of all the comforts he has around him; he takes his meals there gravely and "like a king."

Such are the pleasures of home. A guest enters there to fortify these natural inclinations by the ascendency of duty. Religion appears, as it must, in emotions and visions: for this is not a calm soul; imagination breaks out into it at the least shock, and carries it to the threshold of madness. On the day when Robinson Crusoe saw the "print of a naked man's foot on the shore," he stood "like one thunderstruck," and fled "like a hare to cover;" his ideas are in a whirl, he is

[1] *Robinson Crusoe*, ch. iv. 79. [2] *Ibid.* 80.

no longer master of them; though he is hidden and barricaded, he thinks himself discovered; he intends "to throw down the enclosures, turn all the tame cattle wild into the woods, dig up the corn-fields." He has all kind of fancies; he asks himself if it is not the devil who has left this footmark; and reasons upon it:

"I considered that the devil might have found out abundance of other ways to have terrified me; . . . that, as I lived quite on the other side of the island, he would never have been so simple to leave a mark in a place, where it was ten thousand to one whether I should ever see it or not, and in the sand too, which the first surge of the sea upon a high wind would have defaced entirely. All this seemed inconsistent with the thing itself, and with all notions we usually entertain of the subtlety of the devil."[1]

In this impassioned and uncultivated mind, which for eight years had continued without a thought, and as it were stupid, engrossed in manual labour and bodily wants, belief took root, fostered by anxiety and solitude. Amidst the risks of all-powerful nature, in this great uncertain upheaving, a Frenchman, a man bred as we are, would cross his arms gloomily like a Stoic, or would wait like an Epicurean for the return of physical cheerfulness. As for Crusoe, at the sight of the ears of barley which have suddenly made their appearance, he weeps, and thinks at first "that God had miraculously caused this grain to grow." Another day he has a terrible vision: in a fever of excitement he repents of his sins; he opens the Bible, and finds these words, which "were very apt to his case:" "Call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me."[2] Prayer then rises to his

[1] *Robinson Crusoe*, ch. xi. 184. [2] *Ibid.* 187. Ps. l. 15.

lips, true prayer, the converse of the heart with a God who answers, and to whom we listen. He also read the words: "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee."[1] "Immediately it occurred that these words were to me. Why else should they be directed in such a manner, just at the moment when I was mourning over my condition, as one forsaken of God and man?"[2] Thenceforth spiritual life begins for him. To reach its very foundation, the squatter needs only his Bible; with it he carries about his faith, his theology, his worship; every evening he finds in it some application to his present condition: he is no longer alone: God speaks to him, and provides for his energy matter for a second labour to sustain and complete the first. For he now undertakes against his heart the combat which he has maintained against nature; he wants to conquer, transform, ameliorate, pacify the one as he has done with the other. Robinson Crusoe fasts, observes the Sabbath, three times a day he reads the Scripture, and says: "I gave humble and hearty thanks . . . that he (God) could fully make up to me the deficiencies of my solitary state, and the want of human society by his presence, and the communication of his grace to my soul, supporting, comforting, and encouraging me to depend upon his providence, and hope for his eternal presence hereafter."[3] In this disposition of mind there is nothing a man cannot endure or do; heart and hand come to the assistance of the arms; religion consecrates labour, piety feeds patience; and man, supported on one side by his instincts, on the other by his belief, finds himself able to clear the land, to people, to organise and civilise continents.

[1] Heb. xiii. 5. [2] *Robinson Crusoe*, ch. viii. 134. [3] *Ibid.* ch. viii. 133.

III.

It was by chance that De Foe, like Cervantes, lighted on a novel of character: as a rule, like Cervantes, he only wrote novels of adventure; he knew life better than the soul, and the general course of the world better than the idiosyncrasies of an individual. But the impulse was given, nevertheless, and now the rest followed. Chivalrous manners had been blotted out, carrying with them the poetical and picturesque drama. Monarchical manners had been blotted out, carrying with them the witty and licentious drama. Citizen manners had been established, bringing with them domestic and practical reading. Like society, literature changed its course. Books were needed to read by the fireside, in the country, amongst the family: invention and genius turn to this kind of writing. The sap of human thought, abandoning the old dried-up branches, flowed into the unseen boughs, which it suddenly made to grow and turn green, and the fruits which it produced bear witness at the same time to the surrounding temperature and the native stock. Two features are common and proper to them. All these novels are character novels. Englishmen, more reflective than others, more inclined to the melancholy pleasure of concentrated attention and inner examination, find around them human medals more vigorously struck, less worn by friction with the world, whose uninjured face is more visible than that of others. All these novels are works of observation, and spring from a moral design. The men of this time, having fallen away from lofty imagination, and being immersed in active life, desire to cull from books solid instruction, just examples, power-

ful emotions, feelings of practical admiration, and motives of action.

We have but to look around; the same inclination begins on all sides the same task. The novel springs up everywhere, and shows the same spirit under all forms. At this time[1] appear the *Tatler*, *Spectator*, *Guardian*, and all those agreeable and serious essays which, like the novel, look for readers at home, to supply them with examples and provide them with counsels; which, like the novel, describe manners, paint characters, and try to correct the public; which, finally, like the novel, turn spontaneously to fiction and portraiture. Addison, like a delicate amateur of moral curiosities, complacently follows the amiable oddities of his darling Sir Roger de Coverley, smiles, and with discreet hand guides the excellent knight through all the awkward predicaments which may bring out his rural prejudices and his innate generosity; whilst by his side the unhappy Swift, degrading man to the instincts of the beast of prey and beast of burden, tortures humanity by forcing it to recognise itself in the execrable portrait of the Yahoo. Although they differ, both authors are working at the same task. They only employ imagination in order to study characters, and to suggest plans of conduct. They bring down philosophy to observation and application. They only dream of reforming or chastising vice. They are only moralists and psychologists. They both confine themselves to the consideration of vice and virtue; the one with calm benevolence, the other with savage indignation. The same point of view produces the graceful portraits of Addison and the slanderous pictures

[1] 1709, 1711, 1713.

of Swift. Their successors do the like, and all diversities of mood and talent do not hinder their works from acknowledging a similar source, and concurring in the same effect.

Two principal ideas can rule, and have ruled, morality in England. Now it is conscience which is accepted as a sovereign; now it is instinct which is taken for guide. Now they have recourse to grace; now they rely on nature. Now they wholly enslave everything to rule; now they give everything up to liberty. The two opinions have successively reigned in England; and the human frame, at once too vigorous and too unyielding, successively justifies their ruin and their success. Some, alarmed by the fire of an over-fed temperament, and by the energy of unsocial passions, have regarded nature as a dangerous beast, and placed conscience with all its auxiliaries, religion, law, education, proprieties, as so many armed sentinels to repress its least outbreaks. Others, repelled by the harshness of an incessant constraint, and by the minuteness of a morose discipline, have overturned guards and barriers, and let loose captive nature to enjoy the free air and sun, deprived of which it was being choked. Both by their excesses have deserved their defeats and raised up their adversaries. From Shakspeare to the Puritans, from Milton to Wycherley, from Congreve to De Foe, from Sheridan to Burke, from Wilberforce to Lord Byron, irregularity has provoked constraint and tyranny revolt. This great contest of rule and nature is developed again in the writings of Fielding and Richardson.

IV.

"*Pamela, or Virtue rewarded,* in a series of familiar letters from a beautiful young damsel to her parents, published in order to cultivate the principles of virtue and religion in the minds of the youth of both sexes; a narrative which has its foundation in truth and at the same time that it agreeably entertains by a variety of curious and affecting incidents, is entirely divested of all those images which, in too many pieces calculated for amusement only, tend to inflame the minds they should instruct."[1] We can make no mistake, the title is clear. The preachers rejoiced to see assistance coming to them from the very spot where there was danger; and Dr. Sherlock, from his pulpit, recommended the book. Men inquired about the author. He was a printer and bookseller, a joiner's son, who, at the age of fifty, and in his leisure moments, wrote in his shop parlour: a laborious man, who, by work and good conduct, had raised himself to a competency and had educated himself; delicate moreover, gentle, nervous, often ill, with a taste for the society of women, accustomed to correspond for and with them, of reserved and retired habits, whose only fault was a timid vanity. He was severe in principles, and had acquired perspicacity by his rigour. In reality, conscience is a lamp; a moralist is a psychologist; Christian casuistry is a sort of natural history of the soul. He who through anxiety of conscience busies himself in drawing out the good or evil motives of his manifest actions, who sees vices and virtues at their birth, who follows the gradual

[1] 1741. The translator has consulted the tenth edition, 1775, 4 vols.

progress of culpable thoughts, and the secret confirmation of good resolves, who can mark the force, nature, and moment of temptation and resistance, holds in his hand almost all the moving strings of humanity, and has only to make them vibrate regularly to draw from them the most powerful harmonies. In this consists the art of Richardson; he combines whilst he observes; his meditation develops the ideas of the moralist. No one in this age has equalled him in these detailed and comprehensive conceptions, which, grouping to a single end the passions of thirty characters, twine and colour the innumerable threads of the whole canvas, to bring out a figure, an action, or a lesson.

This first novel is a flower—one of those flowers which only bloom in a virgin imagination, at the dawn of original invention, whose charm and freshness surpass all that the maturity of art and genius can afterwards cultivate or arrange. Pamela is a child of fifteen, brought up by an old lady, half servant and half favourite, who, after the death of her mistress, finds herself exposed to the growing seductions and persecutions of the young master of the house. She is a genuine child, frank and artless as Goethe's Margaret, and of the same family. After twenty pages, we involuntarily see this fresh rosy face, always blushing, and her laughing eyes, so ready with tears. At the smallest kindness she is confused; she knows not what to say; she changes colour, casts down her eyes, as she makes a curtsey; the poor innocent heart is troubled or melts.[1] No trace of the bold vivacity,

[1] "To be sure I did think nothing but curt'sy and cry, and was all in confusion at his goodness."

the nervous coolness, which are the elements of a French girl. She is "a lambkin," loved, loving, without pride, vanity, bitterness; timid, always humble. When her master tries forcibly to kiss her, she is astonished; she will not believe that the world is so wicked. "This gentleman has degraded himself to offer freedoms to his poor servant."[1] She is afraid of being too free with him; reproaches herself, when she writes to her relatives, with saying too often *he* and *him* instead of his honour; "but it is his fault if I do, for why did he lose all his dignity with me?"[2] No outrage exhausts her submissiveness: he has kissed her, and took hold of her arm so rudely that it was "black and blue;" he has tried worse, he has behaved like a ruffian and a knave. To cap all, he slanders her circumstantially before the servants; he insults her repeatedly, and provokes her to speak; she does not speak, will not fail in her duty to her master. "It is for you, sir, to say what you please, and for me only to say, God bless your honour!"[3] She falls on her knees, and thanks him for sending her away. But in so much submission what resistance! Everything is against her; he is her master; he is a justice of the peace, secure against all intervention—a sort of divinity to her, with all the superiority and authority of a feudal prince. Moreover, he has the brutality of the times; he rates her, speaks to her like a slave, and yet thinks himself very kind. He shuts her up alone for several months, with "a wicked creature," his housekeeper, who beats

"I was so confounded at these words, you might have beat me down with a feather. . . . So, like a fool, I was ready to cry, and went away curt'sying, and blushing, I am sure, up to the ears."

[1] *Pamela*, vol. i. Letter x. [2] *Ibid.* [3] *Ibid.* Letter xxvii.

and threatens her. He tries on her the influence of fear, loneliness, surprise, money, gentleness. And what is more terrible, her own heart is against her: she loves him secretly; her virtues injure her; she dare not lie, when she most needs it;[1] and piety keeps her from suicide, when that seems her only resource. One by one the issues close around her, so that she loses hope, and the readers of her adventures think her lost and ruined. But this native innocence has been strengthened by Puritanic faith. She sees temptations in her weaknesses; she knows that "Lucifer always is ready to promote his own work and workmen;"[2] she is penetrated by the great Christian idea, which makes all souls equal before the common salvation and the final judgment. She says: "My soul is of equal importance to the soul of a princess, though my quality is inferior to that of the meanest slave."[3] Wounded, stricken, abandoned, betrayed, still the knowledge and thought of a happy or an unhappy eternity are two defences which no assault can carry. She knows it well; she has no other means of explaining vice than to suppose them absent. She considers that wicked Mrs. Jewkes is an atheist. Belief in God, the heart's belief—not the wording of the catechism, but the inner feeling, the habit of picturing justice as ever living and ever present—this is the fresh blood which the Reformation caused to flow into the veins of the old world, and which alone could give it a new life and a new youth.

She is, as it were, animated by this feeling; in the most perilous as in the sweetest moments, this grand sentiment returns to her, so much is it entwined with

[1] "I dare not tell a wilful lie."

[2] *Pamela*, i. Letter xxv. [3] *Ibid.* Letter to Mr. Williams, i. 208.

all the rest, so much has it multiplied its tendrils and buried its roots in the innermost folds of her heart. Her young master thinks of marrying her now, and wishes to be sure that she loves him. She dares not say so, being afraid to give him a hold upon her. She is greatly troubled by his kindness, and yet she must answer. Religion comes to veil love in a sublime half-confession: "I fear not, sir, the grace of God supporting me, that any acts of kindness would make me forget what I owe to my virtue; but . . . my nature is too frank and open to make me wish to be ungrateful; and if I should be taught a lesson I never yet learnt, with what regret should I descend to the grave, to think that I could not hate my undoer; and that, at the last great day, I must stand up as an accuser of the poor unhappy soul, that I could wish it in my power to save!"[1] He is softened and vanquished, descends from that vast height where aristocratic customs placed him, and thenceforth, day by day, the letters of the happy child record the preparations for their marriage. Amidst this triumph and happiness she continues humble, devoted, and tender; her heart is full, and gratitude fills it from every source: "This foolish girl must be, after twelve o'clock this day, as much his wife as if he were to marry a duchess."[2] She "had the boldness to kiss his hand."[3] "My heart is so wholly yours, that I am afraid of nothing but that I may be forwarder than you wish."[4] Shall the marriage take place Monday, or Tuesday, or Wednesday? She dare not say Yes; she blushes and trembles: there is a delightful charm in this timid modesty, these restrained effusions. For a wedding present she obtains

[1] *Pamela*, i. 290. [2] *Ibid.* ii. 167. [3] *Ibid.* ii. 78. [4] *Ibid.* ii. 148.

the pardon of the wicked creatures who have ill-treated her: "I clasped my arms about his neck, and was not ashamed to kiss him once, and twice, and three times, once for each forgiven person."[1] Then they talk over their plans: she shall remain at home; she will not frequent grand parties; she is not fond of cards; she will keep the "family accounts," and distribute her husband's charities; she will help the housekeeper in "the making jellies, comfits, sweetmeats, marmalades, cordials, and to pot, and candy, and preserve,"[2] to get up the linen; she will look after the breakfast and dinner, especially when there are guests; she knows how to carve; she will wait for her husband, who perhaps will be so good as now and then to give her an hour or two of his "agreeable conversation," "and will be indulgent to the impertinent overflowings of my grateful heart."[3] In his absence she will read—"that will help to polish my mind, and make me worthier of your company and conversation;"[4] and she will pray to God, she says, in order "that I may be enabled to discharge my duty to my husband."[5] Richardson has sketched here the portrait of the English wife—a good housekeeper and sedentary, studious and obedient, loving and pious—and Fielding will finish it in his *Amelia*.

Pamela's adventures describe a contest: the novel of Clarissa Harlowe represents one still greater. Virtue, like force of every kind, is proportioned according to its power of resistance; and we have only to subject it to more violent tests, to give it its greatest prominence. Let us look in passions of the English for foes capable of assailing virtue, calling it forth,

[1] *Pamela*, ii. 194. [2] *Ibid.* ii. 62. [3] *Ibid.*
[4] *Ibid.* ii. 63. [5] *Ibid.*

and strengthening it. The evil and the good of the English character is a too strong will.[1] When tenderness and lofty reason fail, the native energy becomes sternness, obstinacy, inflexible tyranny, and the heart a den of malevolent passions, eager to rave and tear each other. Against a family, having such passions, Clarissa Harlowe has to struggle. Her father never would be "controuled, nor yet persuaded."[2] He never "did give up one point he thought he had a right to carry."[3] He has broken down the will of his wife, and degraded her to the part of a dumb servant: he wishes to break down the will of his daughter, and to give her for a husband a coarse and heartless fool. He is the head of the family, master of all his people, despotic and ambitious as a Roman patrician, and he wishes to found a house. He is stern in these two harsh resolves, and inveighs against the rebellious daughter. Above the outbursts of his voice we hear the loud wrath of his son, a sort of plethoric, over-fed bull-dog, excited by his greed, his youth, his fiery temper, and his premature authority; the shrill outcry of the eldest daughter, a coarse, plain-looking girl, with "a plump, high-fed face," exactingly jealous, prone to hate, who, being neglected by Lovelace, revenges herself on her beautiful sister; the churlish growling of the two uncles, narrow-minded old bachelors, vulgar, pig-headed, through their notions of male authority; the grievous importunities of the mother, the aunt, the old nurse, poor timid slaves, reduced one by one to become instruments of persecution. The whole family have bound themselves to favour Mr. Solmes'

[1] See in *Pamela* the characters of Squire B. and Lady Davers.
[2] *Clarissa Harlowe*, 4th ed. 1751, 7 vols. i. 92. [3] *Ibid.* i. 105.

proposal to marry Clarissa. They do not reason, they simply express their will. By dint of repetition, only one idea has fixed itself in their brain, and they become furious when any one endeavours to oppose it. "Who at the long run must submit?" asks her mother; "all of us to you, or you to all of us?"[1] Clarissa offers to remain single, never to marry at all; she consents to give up her property. But her family answered: "They had a right to her obedience upon their own terms; her proposal was an artifice, only to gain time; nothing but marrying Mr. Solmes should do; . . . they should not be at rest till it was done."[2] It must be done, they have promised it; it is a point of honour with them. A girl, a young, inexperienced, insignificant girl, to resist men, old men, people of position and consideration, nay, her whole family—monstrous! So they persist, like brutes as they are, blindly, putting on the screw with all their stupid hands together, not seeing that at every turn they bring the child nearer to madness, dishonour, or death. She begs them, implores them, one by one, with every argument and prayer; racks herself to discover concessions, goes on her knees, faints, makes them weep. It is all useless. The indomitable, crushing will oppresses her with its daily increasing mass. There is no example of such a varied moral torture, so incessant, so obstinate. They persist in it, as if it were a task, and are vexed to find that she makes their task so long. They refuse to see her, forbid her to write, are afraid of her tears. Her sister Arabella, with the venomous bitterness of an offended, ugly woman, tries to make her insults more stinging:

[1] *Clarissa Harlowe*, i. Letter xx. 125. [2] *Ibid.* i. Letter xxxix. 253.

"'The *witty*, the *prudent*, nay the *dutiful* and pi-ous (so she sneeringly pronounced the word) Clarissa Harlowe, should be so strangely fond of a profligate man, that her parents were forced to lock her up, in order to hinder her from running into his arms.' 'Let me ask you, my dear,' said she, 'how you now keep your account of the disposition of your time? How many hours in the twenty-four do you devote to your needle? How many to your prayers? How many to letter-writing? And how many to love? I doubt, I doubt, my little dear, the latter article is like Aaron's rod, and swallows up all the rest. . . . You must therefore bend or break, that is all, child.'[1] . . .

"'What, not speak yet? Come, my sullen, silent dear, speak one word to me. You must say *two* very soon to Mr. Solmes, I can tell you that. . . . Well, well (insultingly wiping my averted face with her handkerchief) . . . Then you think you may be brought to speak the two words.'"[2]

She continues thus:

"'*This*, Clary, is a pretty pattern enough. But *this* is quite charming?—And *this*, were I you, should be my wedding night-gown.—But, Clary, won't you have a velvet suit? It would cut a great figure in a country church, you know. Crimson velvet, suppose! Such a fine complexion as yours, how it would be set off by it!—And do you sigh, love? Black velvet, so fair as you are, with those charming eyes, gleaming through a wintry cloud, like an April sun. Does not Lovelace tell you they are charming eyes?'"[3]

Then, when Arabella is reminded that, three months ago, she did not find Lovelace so worthy of scorn, she nearly chokes with passion; she wants to beat her sister, cannot speak, and says to her aunt, "with great violence:" "Let us go, madam; let us leave the crea-

[1] *Clarissa Harlowe*, i. Letter xlii. 278. [2] *Ibid.* i. Letter xliii. 295.
[3] *Ibid.* i. Letter xlv. 308.

ture to swell till she bursts with her own poison."[1] It reminds us of a pack of hounds in full cry after a deer, which is caught, and wounded; whilst the pack grow more eager and more ferocious, because they have tasted blood.

At the last moment, when she thinks to escape them, a new chase begins, more dangerous than the other. Lovelace has all the evil passions of Harlowe, and in addition a genius which sharpens and aggravates them. What a character! How English! how different from the Don Juan of Mozart or of Molière! Before everything he wishes to have the cruel fair one in his power: then come the desire to bend others, a combative spirit, a craving for triumph; only after all these come the senses. He spares an innocent, young girl, because he knows she is easy to conquer, and the grandmother "has besought him to be merciful to her." "The *Debellare superbos* should be my motto,"[2] he writes to his friend Belford; and in another letter he says, "I always considered opposition and resistance as a challenge to do my worst."[3] At bottom, pride, infinite, insatiable, senseless, is the mainspring, the only motive of all his actions. He acknowledges "that he only wanted Cæsar's outsetting to make a figure among his contemporaries,"[4] and that he only stoops to private conquests out of mere whim. He declares that he would not marry the first princess on earth, if he but thought she balanced a minute in her choice of him or of an emperor. He is held to be gay, brilliant, conversational; but this petulance of animal vigour is only external; he is cruel, jests savagely, in cool blood, like

[1] *Clarissa Harlowe*, i. Letter xlv. 309. [2] *Ibid.* Letter xxxiv. 223.
[3] *Ibid.* ii. Letter xliii. 315. [4] *Ibid.* i. Letter xii. 65.

a hangman, about the harm which he has done or means to do. He reassures a poor servant who is troubled at having given up Clarissa to him in the following words: "The affair of Miss Betterton was a youthful frolick. . . . I went into mourning for her, though abroad at the time,—a distinction I have ever paid to those worthy creatures who died in childbed by me. . . . Why this squeamishness, then, honest Joseph?"[1] The English roysterers of those days threw the human body in the sewers. One gentleman, a friend of Lovelace, "tricked a farmer's daughter, a pretty girl, up to town, . . . drank her light-hearted, . . . then to the play, . . . then to the bagnio, ruined her; kept her on a fortnight or three weeks; then left her to the mercy of the people of the bagnio (never paying for anything), who stript her of all her cloaths, and because she would not take on, threw her into prison, where she died in want and in despair."[2] The rakes in France were only rascals,[3] here they were villains; wickedness with them poisoned love. Lovelace hates Clarissa even more than he loves her. He has a book in which he sets down, he says, "all the family faults and the infinite trouble she herself has given me. When my heart is soft, and all her own, I can but turn to my memoranda, and harden myself at once."[4] He is angry because she dares to defend herself, says that he'll teach her to vie with him in inventions, to make plots against and for her conqueror. It is a struggle between them without truce or halting. Lovelace says

[1] *Clarissa Harlowe*, iii. Letter xviii. 89.
[2] *Ibid.* vii. Letter xxxviii. 122.
[3] See the *Mémoires* of the Marshal de Richelieu.
[4] *Clarissa Harlowe*, ii. Letter xxxix. 294.

of himself: "What an industrious spirit have I! Nobody can say that I eat the bread of idleness; . . . certainly, with this active soul, I should have made a very great figure in whatever station I had filled."[1] He assaults and besieges her, spends whole nights outside her house, gives the Harlowes servants of his own, invents stories, introduces personages under a false name, forges letters. There is no expense, fatigue, plot, treachery which he will not undertake. All weapons are the same to him. He digs and plans even when away, ten, twenty, fifty saps, which all meet in the same mine. He provides against everything; he is ready for everything; divines, dares everything, against all duty, humanity, common sense, in spite of the prayers of his friends, the entreaties of Clarissa, his own remorse. Excessive will, here as with the Harlowes, becomes an iron wheel, which twists out of shape and breaks to pieces what it ought to bend, so that at last, by blind impetuosity, it is broken by its own impetus, over the ruins it has made.

Against such assaults what resources has Clarissa? A will as determined as Lovelace's. She also is armed for war, and admits that she has as much of her father's spirit as of her mother's gentleness. Though gentle, though readily driven into Christian humility, she has pride; she "had hoped to be an example to young persons" of her sex; she possesses the firmness of a man, and above all a masculine reflection.[2] What self-scrutiny! what vigilance! what minute and indefatigable observation of her conduct, and of that of others![3]

[1] *Clarissa Harlowe*, iv. xxxiii. 232.

[2] See (vol vii. Letter xlix.) among other other things her last Will.

[3] She makes out statistics and a classification of Lovelace's merits

No action, or word, involuntary or other gesture of Lovelace is unobserved by her, uninterpreted, unjudged, with the perspicacity and clearness of mind of a diplomatist and a moralist! We must read these long conversations, in which no word is used without calculation, genuine duels daily renewed, with death, nay, with dishonour before her. She knows it, is not disturbed, remains ever mistress of herself, never exposes herself, is not dazed, defends every inch of ground, feeling that all the world is on his side, no one for her, that she loses ground, and will lose more, that she will fall, that she is falling. And yet she bends not. What a change since Shakspeare! Whence comes this new and original idea of woman? Who has encased these yielding and tender innocents with such heroism and calculation? Puritanism transferred to the laity. Clarissa "never looked upon any duty, much less a voluntary vowed one, with indifference." She has passed her whole life in looking at these duties. She has placed certain principles before her, has reasoned upon them, applied them to the various circumstances of life, has fortified herself on every point with maxims, distinctions, and arguments. She has set round her, like bristling and multiplied ramparts, a numberless army of inflexible precepts. We can only reach her by turning over her whole mind and her whole past. This is her force, and also her weakness; for she is so carefully defended by her fortifications,

and faults, with subdivisions and numbers. Take an example of this positive and practical English logic: "That such a husband might unsettle me in all my own principles, and hazard my future hopes. That he has a very immoral character to women. That knowing this, it is a high degree of impurity to think of joining in wedlock with such a man." She keeps all her writings, her memorandums, summaries or analyses of her own letters.

that she is a prisoner; her principles are a snare to her, and her virtue destroys her. She wishes to preserve too much decorum. She refuses to apply to a magistrate, for it would make public the family quarrels. She does not resist her father openly; that would be against filial humility. She does not repel Solmes violently, like a hound, as he is; it would be contrary to feminine delicacy. She will not leave home with Miss Howe; that might injure the character of her friend. She reproves Lovelace when he swears,[1] a good Christian ought to protest against scandal. She is argumentative and pedantic, a politician and a preacher; she wearies us, she does not act like a woman. When a room is on fire, a young girl flies barefooted, and does not do what Miss Clarissa does—ask for her slippers. I am very sorry for it, but I say it with bated breath, the sublime Clarissa had a little mind; her virtue is like the piety of devotees, literal and overnice. She does not carry us away, she has always her guide of deportment in her hand; she does not discover her duties, but follows instructions; she has not the audacity of great resolutions, she possesses more conscience and firmness than enthusiasm and genius.[2] This is the disadvantage of morality pushed to an extreme, no matter what the school or the aim is. By dint of regulating man, we narrow him.

Poor Richardson, unsuspiciously, has been at pains to set the thing forth in broad light, and has created Sir Charles Grandison "a man of true honour." I

[1] "Swearing is a most unmanly vice, and cursing as poor and low a one, since it proclaims the profligate's want of power and his wickedness at the same time; for could such a one punish as he speaks, he would be a fiend."—Vol. ii. Letter xxxviii. 232.

[2] The contrary is the case with the heroines of George Sand's novels.

cannot say whether this model has converted many. There is nothing so insipid as an edifying hero. This Sir Charles is as correct as an automaton; he passes his life in weighing his duties, and "with an air of gallantry."[1] When he goes to visit a sick person, he has scruples about going on a Sunday, but reassures his conscience by saying, "I am afraid I must borrow of the Sunday some hours on my journey; but visiting the sick is an act of mercy."[2] Would any one believe that such a man could fall in love? Such is the case, however, but in a manner of his own. Thus he writes to his betrothed: "And now, loveliest and dearest of women, allow me to expect the honour of a line, to let me know how much of the tedious month from last Thursday you will be so good to abate. . . . My utmost gratitude will ever be engaged by the condescension, whenever you shall distinguish the day of the year, distinguished as it will be to the end of my life that shall give me the greatest blessing of it and confirm me—for ever yours, Charles Grandison."[3] A wax figure could not be more proper. All is in the same taste. There are eight wedding-coaches, each with four horses; Sir Charles is attentive to old people; at table, the gentlemen, each with a napkin under his arm, wait upon the ladies; the bride is ever on the point of fainting; he throws himself at her feet with the utmost politeness: "What, my love! In compliment to the best of parents resume your usual presence of mind. I, else, who shall glory before a thousand witnesses in receiving the

[1] See *Sir Charles Grandison*, 7 vols. 1811, iii. Letter xvi. 142: "He received the letters, standing up, bowing; and kissed the papers with an air of gallantry, that I thought greatly became him."

[2] *Ibid.* vi. Letter xxxi. 236. [3] *Ibid.* vi. Letter xxxiii. 252.

honour of your hand, shall be ready to regret that I acquiesced so cheerfully with the wishes of those parental friends for a public celebration."[1] Courtesies begin, compliments fly about; a swarm of proprieties flutters around, like a troop of little love-cherubs, and their devout wings serve to sanctify the blessed tendernesses of the happy couple. Tears abound; Harriet bemoans the fate of Sir Hargrave Pollexfen, whilst Sir Charles, "in a soothing, tender, and respectful manner, put his arm round me, and taking my own handkerchief, unresisted, wiped away the tears as they fell on my cheek. Sweet humanity! Charming sensibility! Check not the kindly gush. Dewdrops of heaven! (wiping away my tears, and kissing the handkerchief), dew-drops of heaven, from a mind like that heaven mild and gracious!"[2] It is too much; we are surfeited, we say to ourselves that these phrases should be accompanied by a mandoline. The most patient of mortals feels himself sick at heart when he has swallowed a thousand pages of this sentimental twaddle, and all the milk and water of love. To crown all, Sir Charles, seeing Harriet embrace her rival, sketches the plan of a little temple, dedicated to Friendship, to be built on the very spot; it is the triumph of mythological bad taste. At the end, bouquets shower down as at the opera; all the characters sing in unison a chorus in praise of Sir Charles, and his wife says: "But could he be otherwise than the best of husbands, who was the most dutiful of sons, who is the most affectionate of brothers; the most faithful of friends: who is good upon principle in every relation of life!"[3] He is great, he is generous, delicate, pious,

[1] *Sir Charles Grandison*, vi. Letter lii. 358.
[2] *Ibid.* vi. Letter xxxi. 233. [3] *Ibid.* vii. Letter lxi. 336.

irreproachable; he has never done a mean action, nor made a wrong gesture. His conscience and his wig are unsullied. Amen! Let us canonise him, and stuff him with straw.

Nor, my dear Richardson, have you, great as you are, exactly all the wit which is necessary in order to have enough. By seeking to serve morality, you prejudice it. Do you know the effect of these edifying advertisements which you stick on at the beginning or end of your books? We are repelled, feel our emotion diminish, see the black-gowned preacher come snuffling out of the worldly dress which he had assumed for an hour; we are annoyed by the deceit. Insinuate morality, but do not inflict it. Remember there is a substratum of rebellion in the human heart, and that if we too openly set ourselves to wall it up with discipline, it escapes and looks for free air outside. You print at the end of *Pamela* the catalogue of the virtues of which she is an example; the reader yawns, forgets his pleasure, ceases to believe, and asks himself if the heavenly heroine was not an ecclesiastical puppet, trotted out to give him a lesson. You relate at the end of *Clarissa Harlowe* the punishment of all the wicked, great and small, sparing none; the reader laughs, says that things happen otherwise in this world, and bids you put in here like Arnolphe,[1] a description "of the cauldrons in which the souls of those who have led evil lives are to boil in the infernal regions." We are not such fools as you take us for. There is no need that you should shout to make us afraid; that you should write out the lesson by itself, and in capitals, in order to distinguish it. We

[1] A selfish and misanthropical cynic in Molière's *École des Femmes*. —TR.

love art, and you have a scant amount of it; we want to be pleased, and you don't care to please us. You copy all the letters, detail the conversations, tell everything, prune nothing; your novels fill many volumes; spare us, use the scissors; be a skilled literary workman, not a registrar of the Rolls office. Do not pour out your library of documents on the high-road. Art is different from nature; the latter draws out, the first condenses. Twenty letters of twenty pages do not display a character; but one brilliant saying does. You are weighed down by your conscience, which compels you to move step by step and slow; you are afraid of your genius; you rein it in; you dare not use loud cries and free speech at the very moment when passion is most virulent. You flounder into emphatic and well-written phrases;[1] you will not show nature as it is, as Shakspeare shows it, when, stung by passion as by a hot iron, it cries out, rears, and bounds over your barriers. You cannot love it, and your punishment is that you cannot see it.[2]

[1] Clarissa and Pamela employ too many.

[2] In *Novels and Novelists*, by W. Forsyth, 1871, it is said, ch. vii.: "To me, I confess, *Clarissa Harlowe* is an unpleasant, not to say odious book. . . . If any book deserved the charge of sickly sentimentality, it is this; and that it should have once been so widely popular, and thought admirably adapted to instruct young women in lessons of virtue and religion, shows a strange and perverted state of the public taste, not to say public morals." Mrs. Oliphant, in her *Historical Sketches of the Reign of George Second*, 1869, says of the same novel (ii. x. 264): "Richardson was a respectable tradesman, . . . a good printer, . . . a comfortable soul, . . . never owing a guinea nor transgressing a rule of morality; and yet so much a poet, that he has added at least one character (Clarissa Harlowe) to the inheritance of the world, of which Shakspeare need not have been ashamed—the most celestial thing, the highest effort of his generation."—Tr.

V.

Fielding protests on behalf of nature; and certainly, to see his actions and his persons, we might think him made expressly for that purpose: a robust, strongly built man, above six feet high, sanguine, with an excess of good humour and animal spirits, loyal, generous, affectionate, and brave, but imprudent, extravagant, a drinker, a roysterer, ruined as his father was before him, having seen the ups and downs of life, not always clean but always jolly. Lady Wortley Montague says of him: "His happy constitution made him forget everything when he was before a venison pasty, or over a flask of champagne."[1] Natural impulse, somewhat coarse but generous, sways him. It does not restrain itself, it flows freely, it follows its own bent, not too choice in its course, not confining itself to banks, miry but copious, and in a broad channel. From the outset an abundance of health and physical impetuosity plunges Fielding into gross jovial excess, and the immoderate sap of youth bubbles up in him until he marries and becomes ripe in years. He is gay, and seeks gaiety; he is careless, and has not even literary vanity. One day Garrick begged him to cut down an awkward scene, and told him "that a repulse would flurry him so much, he should not be able to do justice to the part." "If the scene is not a good one, let them find that out," said Fielding; just as was foreseen, the house made a violent uproar, and the performer tried to quell it by retiring to the green-room, where the author was supporting his spirits with a bottle of champagne. "What is the matter, Garrick? are they hissing me

[1] *Lady Montague's Letters*, ed. Lord Wharncliffe 2d ed. 3 vols. 1837; Letter to the Countess of Bute, iii. 120.

now?" "Yes, just the same passage that I wanted you to retrench." "Oh," replied the author, "I did not give them credit for it: they have found it out, have they?"[1] In this easy manner he took all mischances. He went ahead without feeling the bruises much, like a confident man, whose heart expands and whose skin is thick. When he inherited some money he feasted, gave dinners to his neighbours, kept a pack of hounds and a lot of magnificent lackeys in yellow livery. In three years he had spent it all; but courage remained, he finished his law studies, prepared a voluminous Digest of the Statutes at Large, in two folio volumes, which remained unpublished, became a magistrate, destroyed bands of robbers, and earned in the most insipid of labours "the dirtiest money upon earth." Disgust, weariness did not affect him; he was too solidly made to have the nerves of a woman. Force, activity, invention, tenderness, all overflowed in him. He had a mother's fondness for his children, adored his wife, became almost mad when he lost her, found no other consolation than to weep with his maid-servant, and ended by marrying that good and honest girl, that he might give a mother to his children; the last trait in the portrait of this valiant plebeian heart, quick in telling all, having no dislikes, but all the best parts of man, except delicacy. We read his books as we drink a pure, wholesome, and rough wine, which cheers and fortifies us, and which wants nothing but bouquet.

Such a man was sure to dislike Richardson. He who loves expansive and liberal nature, drives from him like foes the solemnity, sadness, and pruderies of the Puritans. His first literary work was to caricature Richardson.

[1] Roscoe's *Life of Fielding*, p. xxv.

His first hero, Joseph, is the brother of Pamela, and resists the proposals of his mistress, as Pamela does those of her master. The temptation, touching in the case of a girl, becomes comical in that of a young man, and the tragic turns into the grotesque. Fielding laughs heartily, like Rabelais, or Scarron. He imitates the emphatic style; ruffles the petticoats and bobs the wigs; upsets with his rude jests all the seriousness of conventionality. If we are refined, or simply well dressed, don't let us go along with him. He will take us to prisons, inns, dunghills, the mud of the roadside; he will make us flounder among rollicking, scandalous, vulgar adventures, and crude pictures. He has plenty of words at command, and his sense of smell is not delicate. Mr. Joseph Andrews, after leaving Lady Booby, is felled to the ground, left naked in a ditch, for dead; a stage-coach came by; a lady objects to receive a naked man inside; and the gentlemen, "though there were several greatcoats about the coach," could not spare them; the coachman, who had two greatcoats spread under him, refused to lend either, lest they should be made bloody.[1] This is but the outset, judge of the rest. Joseph and his friend, the good Parson Adams, give and receive a vast number of cuffs; blows resound; cans of pig's blood are thrown at their heads; dogs tear their clothes to pieces; they lose their horse. Joseph is so good-looking, that he is assailed by the maid-servant, "obliged to take her in his arms and to shut her out of the room;"[2] they have never any money; they are threatened with being sent to prison. Yet they go on in a merry fashion, like their

[1] *The Adventures of Joseph Andrews*, bk. i. ch. xii.
[2] *Ibid.* i. ch. xviii.

brothers in Fielding's other novels, Captain Booth and Tom Jones. These hailstorms of blows, these tavern brawls, this noise of broken warming-pans and basins flung at heads, this medley of incidents and down-pouring of mishaps, combine to make the most joyous music. All these honest folk fight well, walk well, eat well, drink still better. It is a pleasure to observe these potent stomachs; roast-beef goes down into them as to its natural place. Let us not say that these good arms practise too much on their neighbours' skins: the neighbours' hides are tough, and always heal quickly. Decidedly life is a good thing, and we will go along with Fielding, smiling by the way, with a broken head and a bellyful.

Shall we merely laugh? There are many things to be seen on our journey: the sentiment of nature is a talent, like the understanding of certain rules; and Fielding, turning his back on Richardson, opens up a domain as wide as that of his rival. What we call nature is this brood of secret passions, often malicious, generally vulgar, always blind, which tremble and fret within us, ill-covered by the cloak of decency and reason under which we try to disguise them; we think we lead them, and they lead us; we think our actions our own, they are theirs. They are so many, so strong, so interwoven, so ready to rise, break forth, be carried away, that their movements elude all our reasoning and our grasp. This is Fielding's domain; his art and pleasure, like Molière's are in lifting a corner of the cloak; his characters parade with a rational air, and suddenly, through a vista, the reader perceives the inner turmoil of vanities, follies, lusts, and secret rancours which make them move. Thus, when Tom Jones' arm

is broken, philosopher Square comes to console him by an application of stoical maxims; but in proving to him that "pain was the most contemptible thing in the world," he bites his tongue, and lets slip an oath or two; whereupon Parson Thwackum, his opponent and rival, assures him that his mishap, is a warning of Providence, and both in consequence are nearly coming to blows.[1] In *the Life of Mr. Jonathan Wild*, the prison chaplain having aired his eloquence, and entreated the condemned man to repent, accepts from him a bowl of punch, because "it is nowhere spoken against in Scripture;" and after drinking, repeats his last sermon against the pagan philosophers. Thus unveiled, natural impulse has a grotesque appearance; the people advance gravely, cane in hand, but in our eyes they are all naked. Understand, they are every whit naked; and some of their attitudes are very lively. Ladies will do well not to enter here. This powerful genius, frank and joyous, loves boorish feasts like Rubens; the red faces, beaming with good humour, sensuality, and energy, move about his pages, flutter hither and thither, and jostle each other, and their overflowing instincts break forth in violent actions. Out of such he creates his chief characters. He has none more lifelike than these, more broadly sketched in bold and dashing outline, with a more wholesome colour. If sober people like Allworthy remain in a corner of his vast canvas, characters full of natural impulse, like Western, stand out with a relief and brightness, never seen since Falstaff. Western is a country squire, a good fellow in the main, but a drunkard, always in the saddle, full of oaths, ready with coarse language, blows, a sort of dull carter, hardened

[1] *History of a Foundling*, bk. v. ch. ii.

and excited by the brutality of the race, the wildness of a country life, by violent exercise, by abuse of coarse food and strong drink, full of English and rustic pride and prejudice, having never been disciplined by the constraint of the world, because he lives in the country; nor by that of education, since he can hardly read; nor of reflection, since he cannot put two ideas together; nor of authority, because he is rich and a justice of the peace, and given up, like a noisy and creaking weather-cock, to every gust of passion. When contradicted, he grows red, foams at the mouth, wishes to thrash some one. "Doff thy clothes." They are even obliged to stop him by main force. He hastens to go to Allworthy to complain of Tom Jones, who has dared to fall in love with his daughter: "It's well for un I could not get at un: I'd a licked un; I'd a spoiled his caterwauling; I'd a taught the son of a whore to meddle with meat for his master. He shan't ever have a morsel of meat of mine, or a varden to buy it. If she will ha un, one smock shall be her portion. I'd sooner give my estate to the sinking fund, that it may be sent to Hanover, to corrupt our nation with."[1] Allworthy says he is very sorry for it: "Pox o' your sorrow. It will do me abundance of good, when I have lost my only child, my poor Sophy that was the joy of my heart, and all the hope and comfort of my age. But I am resolved I will turn her out o' doors; she shall beg, and starve, and rot in the streets. Not one hapenny, not a hapenny shall she ever hae o' mine. The son of a bitch was always good at finding a hare sitting and be rotted to'n; I little thought what puss he was looking after. But it shall be the worst he ever vound in his life. She

[1] *History of a Foundling* bk. vi. ch. x.

shall be no better than carrion; the skin o'er it is all he shall ha, and zu you may tell un."[1] His daughter tries to reason with him; he storms. Then she speaks of tenderness and obedience; he leaps about the room for joy, and tears come to his eyes. Then she recommences her prayers; he grinds his teeth, clenches his fists, stamps his feet; "I am determined upon this match, and ha him[2] you shall, damn me, if shat unt. Damn me, if shat unt, though dost hang thyself the next morning."[3] He can find no reason; he can only tell her to be a good girl. He contradicts himself, defeats his own plans; is like a blind bull, which butts to right and left, doubles on his path, touches no one, and paws the ground. At the least sound he rushes head foremost, offensively, not knowing why. His ideas are only starts or transports of flesh and blood. Never has the animal so completely covered and absorbed the man. It makes him grotesque; he is so natural and so brute-like: he allows himself to be led, and speaks like a child. He says: "I don't know how 'tis, but, Allworthy, you make me do always just as you please; and yet I have as good an estate as you, and am in the commission of the peace just as yourself."[4] Nothing holds or lasts with him; he is impulsive in everything; he lives but for the moment. Rancour, interest, no passions of long continuance affect him. He embraces people whom he just before wanted to knock down. Everything with him disappears in the fire of the momentary passion, which floods his brain, as it were, in sudden waves, and drowns the rest. Now that he is reconciled to Tom Jones, he cannot rest

[1] *History of a Foundling*, bk. vi. ch. x.
[2] Blifil.
[3] *History of a Foundling*, xvi. ch. ii.
[4] *Ibid.* xviii. ch. ix.

until Tom marries his daughter: "To her, boy, to her, go to her. That's it, little honeys, O that's it. Well, what, is it all over? Hath she appointed the day, boy? What, shall it be to-morrow or next day? I shan't be put off a minute longer than next day; I am resolved. . . . I tell thee it is all flimflam. Zoodikers! she'd have the wedding to-night with all her heart. Would'st not, Sophy? . . . Where the devil is Allworthy; . . . Harkee, Allworthy, I'll bet thee five pounds to a crown, we have a boy to-morrow nine months. But prithee, tell me what wut ha? Burgundy, champagne, or what? For please Jupiter, we'll make a night on't."[1] And when he becomes a grandfather, he spends his time in the nursery, "where he declares the tattling of his little granddaughter, who is above a year and a half old, is sweeter music than the finest cry of dogs in England."[2] This is pure nature, and no one has displayed it more free, more impetuous, ignoring all rule, more abandoned to physical passions than Fielding.

It is not because he loves it like the great impartial artists, Shakspeare and Goethe; on the contrary, he is eminently a moralist; and it is one of the great marks of the age, that reformatory designs are as decided with him as with others. He gives his fictions a practical aim, and commends them by saying that the serious and tragic tone sours, whilst the comic style disposes men to be "more full of good humour and benevolence."[3] Moreover, he satirises vice; he looks upon the passions not as simple forces, but as objects of approbation or blame. At every step he suggests moral conclusions;

[1] *History of a Foundling*, xviii. ch. xii.
[2] Last chapter of the *History of a Foundling*.
[3] Preface to *Joseph Andrews*.

he wants us to take sides; he discusses, excuses, or condemns. He writes an entire novel in an ironical style,[1] to attack and destroy rascality and treason. He is more than a painter, he is a judge, and the two parts agree in him. For a psychology produces a morality: where there is an idea of man, there is an ideal of man; and Fielding, who has seen in man nature as opposed to rule, praises in man nature as opposed to rule; so that, according to him, virtue is but an instinct. Generosity in his eyes is, like all sources of action, a primitive inclination; like all sources of action, it flows on receiving no good from catechisms and phrases; like all sources of action, it flows at times too copious and quick. Take it as it is, and do not try to oppress it under a discipline, or to replace it by an argument. Mr. Richardson, your heroes, so correct, constrained, so carefully made up with their impedimenta of maxims, are cathedral vergers, of use but to drone in a procession. Square or Thwackum, your tirades on philosophical or Christian virtue are mere words, only fit to be heard after dinner. Virtue is in the mood and the blood; a gossipy education and cloistral severity do not assist it. Give me a man, not a show-mannikin or a mere machine, to spout phrases. My hero is the man who is born generous, as a dog is born affectionate, and a horse brave. I want a living heart, full of warmth and force, not a dry pedant, bent on squaring all his actions. This ardent and impulsive character will perhaps carry the hero too far; I pardon his escapades. He will get drunk unawares; he will pick up a girl on his way; he will hit out with a zest; he will not refuse a duel; he will suffer a fine lady to appreciate him, and will accept

[1] *Jonathan Wild.*

her purse; he will be imprudent, will injure his reputation, like Tom Jones; he will be a bad manager, and will get into debt, like Captain Booth. Pardon him for having muscles, nerves, senses, and that overflow of anger or ardour which urges forward animals of a noble breed. But he will let himself be beaten till the blood flows, before he betrays a poor gamekeeper. He will pardon his mortal enemy readily, from sheer kindness, and will send him money secretly. He will be loyal to his mistress, and will be faithful to her, spite of all offers, in the worst destitution, and without the least hope of winning her. He will be liberal with his purse, his trouble, his sufferings, his blood; he will not boast of it; he will have neither pride, vanity, affectation, nor dissimulation; bravery and kindness will abound in his heart, as good water in a good spring. He may be stupid like Captain Booth, a gambler even, extravagant, unable to manage his affairs, liable one day through temptation to be unfaithful to his wife; but he will be so sincere in his repentance, his error will be so involuntary, he will be so carefully, genuinely tender, that she will love him exceedingly,[1] and in good truth he will deserve it. He will be a nurse to her when she is ill, behave as a mother to her; he will himself see to her lying-in; he will feel towards her the adoration of a lover, always, before all the world, even

[1] Amelia is the perfect English wife, an excellent cook, so devoted as to pardon her husband his accidental infidelities, always looking forward to the accoucheur. She says even (bk. iv. ch. vi.), "Dear Billy, though my understanding be much inferior to yours." She is excessively modest, always blushing and tender. Bagillard having written her some love-letters, she throws them away, and says (bk. iii. ch. ix.): "I would not have such a letter in my possession for the universe; I thought my eyes contaminated with reading it."

before Miss Matthews, who seduced him. He says "If I had the world, I was ready to lay it at my Amelia's feet; and so, heaven knows, I would ten thousand worlds."[1] He weeps like a child on thinking of her; he listens to her like a little child. "I believe I am able to recollect much the greatest part (of what she uttered); for the impression is never to be effaced from my memory."[2] He dressed himself "with all the expedition imaginable, singing, whistling, hurrying, attempting by every method to banish thought,"[3] and galloped away, whilst his wife was asleep, because he cannot endure her tears. In this soldier's body, under this brawler's thick breastplate, there is a true woman's heart, which melts, which a trifle disturbs, when she whom he loves is in question; timid in its tenderness, inexhaustible in devotion, in trust, in self-denial, in the communication of its feelings. When a man possesses this, overlook the rest; with all his excesses and his follies, he is better than your well-dressed devotees.

To this we reply; You do well to defend nature, but let it be on condition that you suppress nothing. One thing is wanting in your strongly-built folks—refinement; delicate dreams, enthusiastic elevation, and trembling delicacy exist in nature equally with coarse vigour, noisy hilarity, and frank kindness. Poetry is true, like prose; and if there are eaters and boxers, there are also knights and artists. Cervantes, whom you imitate, and Shakspeare, whom you recall, had this refinement, and they have painted it; in this abundant harvest, which you have gathered so plentifully, you

[1] *Amelia*, bk. ii. ch. viii. [2] *Ibid.* bk. iii. ch. i.
[3] *Ibid.* bk. iii. ch. ii.

have forgotten the flowers. We tire at last of your fisticuffs and tavern bills. You flounder too readily in cowhouses, among the ecclesiastical pigs of Parson Trulliber. We would fain see you have more regard for the modesty of your heroines; wayside accidents raise their tuckers too often; and Fanny, Sophia, Mrs. Heartfree, may continue pure, yet we cannot help remembering the assaults which have lifted their petticoats. You are so coarse yourself, that you are insensible to what is atrocious. You persuade Tom Jones falsely, yet for an instant, that Mrs. Waters, whom he has made his mistress, is his own mother, and you leave the reader during a long time buried in the shame of this supposition. And then you are obliged to become unnatural in order to depict love; you can give but constrained letters; the transports of your Tom Jones are only the author's phrases. For want of ideas he declaims odes. You are only aware of the impetuosity of the senses, the upwelling of the blood, the effusion of tenderness, but you are unacquainted with nervous exaltation and poetic rapture. Man, such as you conceive him, is a good buffalo; and perhaps he is the hero required by a people which gives itself the nickname "John Bull."

VI.

At all events this hero is powerful and formidable; and if at this period we collect in our mind the scattered features of the faces which the novel-writers have made pass before us, we will feel ourselves transported into a half-barbarous world, and to a race whose energy must terrify or revolt all our gentleness. Now let us open a more literal copyist of life: they are doubtless all such,

and declare—Fielding amongst them—that if they imagine a feature, it is because they have seen it; but Smollett has this advantage, that, being mediocre, he chalks out the figures tamely, prosaically, without transforming them by the illumination of genius: the joviality of Fielding and the rigour of Richardson are not there to light up or ennoble the pictures. Let us observe carefully Smollett's manners; let us listen to the confessions of this imitator of Le Sage, who reproaches that author with being gay, and jesting with the mishaps of his hero. He says: "The disgraces of Gil Blas are, for the most part, such as rather excite mirth than compassion: he himself laughs at them, and his transitions from distress to happiness, or at least ease, are so sudden that neither the reader has time to pity him, nor himself to be acquainted with affliction. This conduct . . . prevents that generous indignation which ought to animate the reader against the sordid and vicious disposition of the world. I have attempted to represent modest merit struggling with every difficulty to which a friendless orphan is exposed from his own want of experience as well as from the selfishness, envy, malice, and base indifference of mankind."[1] We hear no longer merely showers of blows, but also knife and sword thrusts, as well as pistol shots. In such a world, when a girl goes out she runs the risk of coming back a woman; and when a man goes out, he runs the risk of not coming back at all. The women bury their nails in the faces of the men; the well-bred gentlemen, like Peregrine Pickle, whip other gentlemen soundly. Having deceived a husband, who refuses to demand satisfaction, Peregrine calls his two servants,

[1] Preface to *Roderick Random*.

"and ordered them to duck him in the canal."[1] Misrepresented by a curate, whom he has horsewhipped, he gets an innkeeper "to rain a shower of blows upon his (the parson's) carcase," who also "laid hold of one of his ears with his teeth, and bit it unmercifully."[2] I could quote from memory a score more of outrages begun or completed. Savage insults, broken jaws, men on the ground beaten with sticks, the churlish sourness of conversations, the coarse brutality of jests, give an idea of a pack of bull-dogs eager to fight each other, who, when they begin to get lively, still amuse themselves by tearing away pieces of flesh. A Frenchman can hardly endure the story of *Roderick Random*, or rather that of Smollett, when he is on board a man-of-war. He is pressed, that is to say, carried off by force, knocked down, attacked with "cudgels and drawn cutlasses," "pinioned like a malefactor," and rolled on board, covered with blood, before the sailors, who laugh at his wounds; and one of them, "seeing my hair clotted together with blood, as it were, into distinct cords, took notice that my bows were manned with the red ropes, instead of my side."[3] Roderick "desired one of his fellow-captives, who was unfettered, to take a handkerchief out of his pocket, and tie it round his head to stop the bleeding; he (the fellow) pulled out my handkerchief, 'tis true, but sold it before my face to a bum-boat woman for a quart of gin." Captain Oakum declares he will have no more sick in his ship, ordered them to be brought on the quarter-deck, commanded that some should receive a round dozen; some spitting blood, others fainting from weakness, whilst not a few became delirious; many died, and of

[1] *Peregrine Pickle*, ch. lx. [2] *Ibid.* ch. xxix. [3] *Ibid.* ch. xxiv.

the sixty-one sick, only a dozen remained alive.[1] To get into this dark, suffocating hospital, swarming with vermin, it is necessary to creep under the close hammocks, and forcibly separate them with the shoulders, before the doctor can reach his patients. Read the story of Miss Williams, a wealthy young girl, of good family, reduced to become a prostitute, robbed, hungry, sick, shivering, strolling about the streets in the long winter nights, amongst "a number of naked wretches reduced to rags and filth, huddled together like swine, in the corner of a dark alley," who depend "upon the addresses of the lowest class, and are fain to allay the rage of hunger and cold with gin; degenerate into a brutal insensibility, rot and die upon a dunghill."[2] She was thrown into Bridewell, where, she says, "in the midst of a hellish crew I was subjected to the tyranny of a barbarian, who imposed upon me tasks that I could not possibly perform, and then punished my incapacity with the utmost rigour and inhumanity. I was often whipped into a swoon, and lashed out of it, during which miserable intervals I was robbed by my fellow-prisoners of everything about me, even to my cap, shoes, and stockings: I was not only destitute of necessaries, but even of food, so that my wretchedness was extreme." One night she tried to hang herself. Two of her fellow-prisoners, who watched her, prevented her. "In the morning my attempt was published among the prisoners, and punished with thirty stripes, the pain of which co-operating with my disappointment and disgrace, bereft me of my senses, and threw me into an ecstasy of madness, during which I tore the flesh from my bones with my teeth, and

[1] *Peregrine Pickle*, ch. xxvii. [2] *Ibid.* ch. xxiii.

dashed my head against the pavement."[1] In vain we turn our eyes on the hero of the novel, Roderick Random, to repose a little after such a spectacle. He is sensual and coarse, like Fielding's heroes, but not good and jovial as these. Pride and resentment are the two principal points in his character. The generous wine of Fielding, in Smollett's hands becomes common brandy. His heroes are selfish; they revenge themselves barbarously. Roderick oppresses the faithful Strap, and ends by marrying him to a prostitute. Peregrine Pickle attacks by a most brutal and cowardly plot the honour of a young girl, whom he wants to marry, and who is the sister of his best friend. We get to hate his rancorous, concentrated, obstinate character, which is at once that of an absolute king accustomed to please himself at the expense of others' happiness, and that of a boor with only the varnish of education. We should be uneasy at living near him; he is good for nothing but to shock or tyrannise over others. We avoid him as we would a dangerous beast; the sudden rush of animal passion and the force of his firm will are so overpowering in him, that when he fails he becomes outrageous. He draws his sword against an innkeeper; he must bleed him, grows mad. Everything, even to his generosities, is spoilt by pride; all, even to his gaieties, is clouded by harshness. Peregrine's amusements are barbarous, and those of Smollett are after the same style. He exaggerates caricature; he thinks to amuse us by showing us mouths gaping to the ears, and noses half-a-foot long; he magnifies a national prejudice or a professional trick until it absorbs the whole character; he jumbles together the most

[1] *Peregrine Pickle*, ch. xxiii.

repulsive oddities,—a Lieutenant Lismahago half roasted by Red Indians; old jack-tars who pass their life in shouting and travestying all sorts of ideas into their nautical jargon; old maids as ugly as monkeys, as fleshless as skeletons, and as sour as vinegar; eccentric people steeped in pedantry, hypochondria, misanthropy, and silence. Far from sketching them slightly, as Le Sage does in *Gil Blas*, he brings into prominent relief each disagreeable feature, overloads it with details, without considering whether they are too numerous, without recognising that they are excessive, without feeling that they are odious, without perceiving that they are disgusting. The public whom he addresses is on a level with his energy and his coarseness; and in order to move such nerves, a writer cannot strike too hard.[1]

But, at the same time, to civilise this barbarity and to control this violence, a faculty appears, common to all, authors and public: serious reflection intent to observe character. Their eyes are turned toward the inner man. They note exactly the individual pecu-

[1] In *Novels and Novelists*, by W. Forsyth, the author says, ch. v. 159: "What is the character of most of these books (novels) which were to correct follies and regulate morality? Of a great many of them, and especially those of Fielding and Smollett, the prevailing features are grossness and licentiousness. Love degenerates into a mere animal passion. . . . The language of the characters abounds in oaths and gross expressions. . . . The heroines allow themselves to take part in conversations which no modest woman would have heard without a blush. And yet these novels were the delight of a bygone generation, and were greedily devoured by women as well as men. Are we therefore to conclude that our great-great-grandmothers . . . were less chaste and moral than their female posterity? I answer, certainly not; but we must infer that they were inferior to them in delicacy and refinement. They were accustomed to hear a spade called a spade, and words which would shock the more fastidious ear in the reign of Queen Victoria were then in common and daily use."—TR.

liarities, and stamp them with such a precise mark that their personage becomes a type, which cannot be forgotten. They are psychologists. The title of a comedy of old Ben Jonson's *Every Man in his Humour*, indicates how old and national this taste is amongst them. Smollett writes a whole novel, *Humphrey Clinker*, on this idea. There is no action in it; the book is a collection of letters written during a tour in Scotland and England. Each of the travellers, after his bent of mind, judges variously of the same objects. A generous, grumbling old gentleman, who employs his spare time by thinking himself ill, a crabbed old maid in search of a husband, a lady's maid, simple and vain, who bravely bungles her spelling; a series of eccentric people, who one after another bring their oddities on the scene,—such are the characters: the pleasure of the reader consists in recognising their humour in their style, in foreseeing their follies, in perceiving the thread which pulls each of their motions, in verifying the connection between their ideas and their actions. When we push this study of human peculiarities to excess we will come upon the origin of Sterne's talent.

VII.

Let us figure to ourselves a man who goes on a journey, with a pair of marvellously magnifying spectacles on his eyes. A hair on his hand, a speck on a tablecloth, a fold of a moving garment, will interest him: at this rate he will not go very far; he will go six steps in a day, and will not quit his room. So Sterne writes four volumes to record the birth of his hero. He perceives the infinitely little, and describes the imperceptible. A man parts his hair on one side;

this, according to Sterne, depends on his whole character, which is of a piece with that of his father, his mother, his uncle, and his whole ancestry; it depends on the structure of his brain, which depends on the circumstances of his conception and his birth, and these on the hobbies of his parents, the humour of the moment, the talk of the preceding hour, the difficulties of the parson, a cut thumb, twenty knots made on a bag; I know not how many things besides. The six or eight volumes of *Tristram Shandy* are employed in summing them up; for the smallest and dullest incident, a sneeze, a badly-shaven beard, drags after it an inextricable network of inter-involved causes, which from above, below, right and left, by invisible prolongations and ramifications, sink into the depths of a character and in the remote vistas of events. Instead of extracting, like the novel-writers, the principal root, Sterne, with marvellous devices and success, devotes himself to drawing out the tangled skein of numberless threads, which are sinuously immersed and dispersed, so as to suck in from all sides the sap and the life. Slender, intertwined, buried as they are, he finds them; he extricates them without breaking, brings them to the light, and there, where we fancied but a stalk, we see with wonder the underground mass and vegetation of the multiplied fibres and fibrils, by which the visible plant grows and is supported.

This is truly a strange talent, made up of blindness and insight, which resembles those diseases of the retina in which the over-excited nerve becomes at once dull and penetrating, incapable of seeing what the most ordinary eyes perceive, capable of observing what the most piercing sight misses. In fact, Sterne is a sickly

and eccentric humorist, a clergyman and a libertine, a fiddler and a philosopher, who preferred "whining over a dead ass to relieving a living mother,"[1] selfish in act, selfish in word, who in everything takes a contrary view of himself and of others. His book is like a great storehouse of articles of *virtu*, where curiosities of all ages, kinds, and countries lie jumbled in a heap; forms of excommunication, medical consultations, passages of unknown or imaginary authors, scraps of scholastic erudition, strings of absurd histories, dissertations, addresses to the reader. His pen leads him; he has neither sequence nor plan; nay, when he lights upon anything orderly, he purposely contorts it; with a kick he sends the pile of folios next to him over the history he has commenced, and dances on the top of them. He delights in disappointing us, in sending us astray by interruptions and delays.[2] Gravity displeases him, he treats it as a hypocrite: to his liking folly is better, and he paints himself in Yorick. In a well-constituted mind ideas march one after another, with uniform motion or acceleration; in this odd brain they jump about like a rout of masks at a carnival, in troops, each dragging his neighbour by the feet, head, coat, amidst the most general and unforeseen hubbub. All his little lopped phrases are somersaults; we pant as we read. The tone is never for two minutes the same; laughter comes, then the beginning of emotion, then scandal, then wonder, then sensibility, then laughter again. The mischievous joker pulls and entangles the threads of all our feelings, and makes us go hither,

[1] Byron's Works, ed. Moore, 17 vols. 1832; *Life*, iii. 127, note.

[2] There is a distinct trace of a spirit similar to that which is here sketched, in a select few of the English writers. Pultock's *Peter Wilkins the Flying Man*, Amory's *Life of John Buncle*, and Southey's *Doctor*, are instances of this. Rabelais is probably their prototype.—TR.

thither, in a whimsical manner, like puppets. Amongst these various threads there are two which he pulls more willingly than the rest. Like all men who have nerves, he is subject to sensibility; not that he is really kindly and tender-hearted; on the contrary, his life is that of an egotist; but on certain days he must needs weep, and he makes us weep with him. He is moved on behalf of a captive bird, of a poor ass, which, accustomed to blows, "looked up pensive," and seemed to say, "Don't thrash me with it (the halter); but if you will, you may."[1] He will write a couple of pages on the attitude of this donkey, and Priam at the feet of Achilles was not more touching. Thus in a silence, in an oath, in the most trifling domestic action, he hits upon exquisite refinements and little heroisms, a variety of charming flowers, invisible to everybody else, which grow in the dust of the driest road. One day Uncle Toby, the invalided captain, catches, after "infinite attempts," a big buzzing fly, who has cruelly tormented him all dinner-time; he gets up, crosses the room on his suffering leg, and opening the window, cries: "Go, poor devil, get thee gone; why should I hurt thee? This world surely is wide enough to hold both thee and me."[2] This womanish sensibility is too fine to be described; we should have to give a whole story—that of Lefevre, for instance—that the perfume might be inhaled; this perfume evaporates as soon as we touch it, and is like the weak fleeting odour of flowers, brought for one moment into a sick-chamber. What still more increases this sad sweetness is the contrast of the free and easy waggeries which, like a hedge of

[1] Sterne's Works, 7 vols., 1783, 3; *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy*, vii. ch. xxxii. [2] *Ibid.* 1, ii. ch. xii.

nettles, encircles them on all sides. Sterne, like all men whose mechanism is over-excited, has odd desires. He loves the nude, not from a feeling of the beautiful, and in the manner of painters, not from sensuality and frankness like Fielding, not from a search after pleasure like Dorat, Boufflers, and all those refined epicures, who at that time were rhyming and enjoying themselves in France. If he goes into dirty places, it is because they are forbidden and not frequented. What he seeks there is singularity and scandal. The allurement of this forbidden fruit is not the fruit, but the prohibition; for he bites by preference where the fruit is half rotten or worm-eaten. That an epicurean delights in detailing the pretty sins of a pretty woman is nothing wonderful; but that a novelist takes pleasure in watching the bedroom of a musty, fusty old couple, in observing the consequences of the fall of a burning chestnut in a pair of breeches,[1] in detailing the questions of Mrs. Wadman on the consequences of wounds in the groin,[2] can only be explained by the aberration of a perverted fancy, which finds its amusement in repugnant ideas, as spoiled palates are pleased by the pungent flavour of decayed cheese.[3] Thus, to read Sterne we should wait for days when we are in a peculiar kind of humour, days of spleen, rain, or when

[1] *Tristram Shandy*, 2, iv. ch. xxvii. [2] *Ibid.* 3, ix. ch. xx.

[3] Sterne, Goldsmith, Burke, Sheridan, Moore, have a tone of their own, which comes from their blood, or from their proximate or distant parentage—the Irish tone. So Hume, Robertson, Smollett, Scott, Burns, Beattie, Reid, D. Stewart, and others, have the Scottish tone. In the Irish or Celtic tone we find an excess of chivalry, sensuality, expansion; in short, a mind less equally balanced, more sympathetic and less practical. The Scotsman, on the other hand, is an Englishman, either slightly refined or narrowed, because he has suffered more and fasted more.

through nervous irritation we are disgusted with rationality. In fact his characters are as unreasonable as himself. He sees in man nothing but fancy, and what he calls the hobby-horse—Uncle Toby's taste for fortifications, Mr. Shandy's fancy for oratorical tirades and philosophical systems. This hobby-horse, according to him, is like a wart, so small at first that we hardly perceive it, and only when it is in a strong light; but it gradually increases, becomes covered with hairs, grows red, and buds out all around: its possessor, who is pleased with and admires it, nourishes it, until at last it is changed into a vast wen, and the whole face disappears under the invasion of the parasite excrescence. No one has equalled Sterne in the history of these human hypertrophies; he puts down the seed, feeds it gradually, makes the propagating threads creep round about, shows the little veins and microscopic arteries which inosculate within, counts the palpitations of the blood which passes through them explains their changes of colour and increase of bulk. Psychological observation attains here one of its extreme developments. A far advanced art is necessary to describe, beyond the confines of regularity and health, the exception or the degeneration; and the English novel is completed here by adding to the representation of form the picture of malformations.

VIII.

The moment approaches when purified manners will, by purifying the novel, give it its final impress and character. Of the two great tendencies manifested by it, native brutality and intense reflection, one at last conquers the other; when literature became severe it expelled from fiction the coarseness of Smollett and the

indecencies of Sterne; and the novel, in every respect moral, before falling into the almost prudish hands of Miss Burney, passes into the noble hands of Goldsmith. His *Vicar of Wakefield* is "a prose idyl," somewhat spoilt by phrases too rhetorical, but at bottom as homely as a Flemish picture. Observe in Terburg's or Mieris' paintings a woman at market or a burgomaster emptying his long glass of beer: the faces are vulgar, the ingenuousness is comical, the cookery occupies the place of honour; yet these good folk are so peaceful, so contented with their small ordinary happiness, that we envy them. The impression left by Goldsmith's book is pretty much the same. The excellent Dr. Primrose is a country clergyman, the whole of whose adventures have for a long time consisted in "migrations from the blue bed to the brown." He has cousins, "even to the fortieth remove," who come to eat his dinner and sometimes to borrow a pair of boots. His wife, who has all the education of the time, is a perfect cook, can almost read, excels in pickling and preserving, and at dinner gives the history of every dish. His daughters aspire to elegance, and even "make a wash for the face over the fire." His son Moses gets cheated at the fair, and sells a colt for a gross of green spectacles. Dr. Primrose himself writes pamphlets, which no one buys, against second marriages of the clergy; writes beforehand in his wife's epitaph, though she was still living, that she was "the only wife of Dr. Primrose," and by way of encouragement, places this piece of eloquence in an elegant frame over the chimney-piece. But the household continues the even tenor of its way; the daughters and the mother slightly domineer over the father of the family; he lets them do so, because he is

an easy-going man; now and again fires off an innocent jest, and busies himself in his new farm, with his two horses, wall-eyed Blackberry and the other without a tail: "Nothing could exceed the neatness of my enclosures, the elms and hedge-rows appearing with inexpressible beauty. . . . Our little habitation was situated at the foot of a sloping hill, sheltered with a beautiful underwood behind, and a prattling river before; on one side a meadow, on the other a green. . . . (It) consisted but of one storey, and was covered with thatch, which gave it an air of great snugness; the walls on the inside were nicely whitewashed. . . . Though the same room served us for parlour and kitchen, that only made it the warmer. Besides, as it was kept with the utmost neatness, the dishes, plates, and coppers, being well scoured, and all disposed in bright rows on the shelves, the eye was agreeably relieved, and did not want richer furniture."[1] They make hay all together, sit under the honeysuckle to drink a bottle of gooseberry wine; the girls sing, the two little ones read; and the parents "would stroll down the sloping field, that was embellished with blue bells and centaury:" "But let us have one bottle more, Deborah, my life, and Moses, give us a good song. What thanks do we not owe to heaven for thus bestowing tranquillity, health, and competence! I think myself happier now than the greatest monarch upon earth. He has no such fireside, nor such pleasant faces about it."[2]

Such is moral happiness. Their misfortune is no less moral. The poor vicar has lost his fortune, and, removing to a small living, turns farmer. The squire

[1] *The Vicar of Wakefield*, ch. iv. [2] *Ibid.* ch. xvii.

of the neighbourhood seduces and carries off his eldest daughter; his house takes fire; his arm was burnt in a terrible manner in saving his two little children. He is put in prison for debt, amongst wretches and rogues, who swear and blaspheme, in a vile atmosphere, sleeping on straw, feeling that his illness increases, foreseeing that his family will soon be without bread, learning that his daughter is dying. Yet he does not give way: he remains a priest and the head of a family, prescribes to each of them his duty; encourages, consoles, provides for, orders, preaches to the prisoners, endures their coarse jests, reforms them; establishes in the prison useful work, and "institutes fines for punishment and rewards for industry." It is not hardness of heart nor a morose temperament which gives him strength; he has the most paternal soul, the most sociable, humane, open to gentle emotions and familiar tenderness. He says: "I have no resentment now; and though he (the squire) has taken from me what I held dearer than all his treasures, though he has wrung my heart (for I am sick almost to fainting, very sick, my fellow-prisoner), yet that shall never inspire me with vengeance. . . . If this (my) submission can do him any pleasure, let him know, that if I have done him any injury, I am sorry for it. . . . I should detest my own heart, if I saw either pride or resentment lurking there. On the contrary, as my oppressor has been once my parishioner, I hope one day to present him up an unpolluted soul at the eternal tribunal."[1] But the hard-hearted squire haughtily repulses the noble application of the vicar, and in addition causes his second daughter to be carried off, and the eldest son to be thrown into prison under a false

[1] *The Vicar of Wakefield*, ch. xxviii.

accusation of murder. At this moment all the affections of the father are wounded, all his consolations lost, all his hopes ruined. "His heart weeps to behold" all this misery, he was going to curse the cause of it all; but soon, returning to his profession and his duty, he thinks how he will prepare to fit his son and himself for eternity, and by way of being useful to as many people as he can, he wishes at the same time to exhort his fellow-prisoners. He "made an effort to rise on the straw, but wanted strength, and was able only to recline against the wall; my son and his mother supported me on either side."[1] In this condition he speaks, and his sermon, contrasting with his condition, is the more moving. It is a dissertation in the English style, made up of close reasoning, seeking only to establish that "Providence has given to the wretched two advantages over the happy in this life," greater felicity in dying; and in heaven all that superiority of pleasure which arises from contrasted enjoyments.[2] We see the sources of this virtue, born of Christianity and natural kindness, but long nourished by inner reflection. Meditation, which usually produces only phrases, results with Dr. Primrose in actions. Verily reason has here taken the helm, and it has taken it without oppressing other feelings; a rare and eloquent spectacle, which, uniting and harmonising in one character the best features of the manners and morals of that time and country, creates an admiration and love for pious and orderly, domestic and disciplined, laborious and rural life. Protestant and English virtue has not a more approved and amiable exemplar. Religious, affectionate, rational, the Vicar unites predilections

[1] *The Vicar of Wakefield*, ch. xxviii. [2] *Ibid.* ch. xxix.

which seemed irreconcilable; a clergyman, a farmer, a head of a family, he enhances those characters which appeared fit only for comic or homely parts.

IX.

We now come upon a strange character, the most esteemed of his time, a sort of literary dictator. Richardson was his friend, and gave him essays for his paper; Goldsmith, with an artless vanity, admires him, whilst suffering to be continually outshone by him; Miss Burney imitates his style, and reveres him as a father. Gibbon the historian, Reynolds the painter, Garrick the actor, Burke the orator, Sir William Jones the Orientalist, come to his club to converse with him. Lord Chesterfield, who had lost his favour, vainly tried to regain it, by proposing to assign to him, on every word in the language, the authority of a dictator.[1] Boswell dogs his steps, sets down his opinions, and at night fills quartos with them. His criticism becomes law; men crowd to hear him talk; he is the arbiter of style. Let us transport in imagination this ruler of mind, Dr. Samuel Johnson, into France, among the pretty drawing-rooms, full of elegant philosophers and epicurean manners; the violence of the contrast will mark better than all argument the bent and predilections of the English mind.

There appears then before us a man whose "person was large, robust, approaching to the gigantic, and grown unwieldy from corpulency,"[2] with a gloomy and

[1] See, in Boswell's *Life of Johnson*, ed. Croker, 1853, ch. xi. p. 85, Chesterfield's complimentary paper on Johnson's *Dictionary*, printed in the *World*.

[2] *Ibid.* ch. xxx. 269.

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unpolished air, "his countenance disfigured by the king's evil," and blinking with one of his eyes, "in a full suit of plain brown clothes," and with not overclean linen, suffering from morbid melancholy since his birth, and moreover a hypochondriac.[1] In company he would sometimes retire to a window or corner of a room, and mutter a Latin verse or a prayer.[2] At other times, in a recess, he would roll his head, sway his body backward and forward, stretch out and then convulsively draw back his leg. His biographer relates that it "was his constant anxious care to go out or in at a door or passage, . . . so as that either his right or his left foot should constantly make the first actual movement; . . . when he had neglected or gone wrong in this sort of magical movement, I have seen him go back again, put himself in the proper posture to begin the ceremony, and having gone through it, walk briskly on and join his companion."[3] People are sitting at table, when suddenly, in a moment of abstraction, he stoops, and clenching hold of the foot of a lady, draws off her shoe.[4] Hardly is the dinner served when he darts on the food; "his looks seemed rivetted to his plate; nor would he, unless when in very high company, say one word, or even pay the least attention to what was said by others; (he) indulged with such intenseness, that, while in the act of eating, the veins of his forehead swelled, and generally a strong perspiration was visible."[5] If by chance the hare was high, or the pie had been made with rancid butter, he no longer ate, but devoured. When at last his appetite was satisfied, and he con-

[1] *Life of Johnson*, ch. iii. 14 and 15. [2] *Ibid.* ch. xviii. 165, n. 4.
[3] *Ibid.* ch. xviii. 166. [4] *Ibid.* ch. xlviii. 439, n. 3.
[5] *Ibid.* ch. xvii. 159.

sented to speak, he disputed, shouted, made a sparring-match of his conversation, triumphed no matter how, laid down his opinion dogmatically, and ill-treated those whom he was refuting. "Sir, I perceive you are a vile Whig."[1] "My dear lady (to Mrs. Thrale), talk no more of this; nonsense can be defended but by nonsense."[2] "One thing I know, which you don't seem to know, that you are very uncivil."[3] "In the intervals of articulating he made various sounds with his mouth, sometimes as if ruminating, . . . sometimes giving a half whistle, sometimes making his tongue play backwards from the roof of his mouth, as if clucking like a hen. . . . Generally, when he had concluded a period, in the course of a dispute, . . . he used to blow out his breath like a whale,"[4] and swallow several cups of tea.

Then in a low voice, cautiously, men would ask Garrick or Boswell the history and habits of this strange being. He had lived like a cynic and an eccentric, having passed his youth reading miscellaneously, especially Latin folios, even those least known, such as Macrobius; he had found on a shelf in his father's shop the Latin works of Petrarch, whilst he was looking for apples, and had read them;[5] "he published proposals for printing by subscription the Latin poems of Politian."[6] At twenty-five he had married for love a woman of about fifty, "very fat, with swelled cheeks, of a florid red, produced by thick painting, flaring and fantastic in her dress,"[7] and who had children as old as

[1] *Life of Johnson*, ch. xxvi. 236.
[2] *Ibid.* ch. xxii. 201.
[3] *Ibid.* ch. lxviii. 628.
[4] *Ibid.* ch. xviii. 166.
[5] *Ibid.* ch. ii. 12.
[6] *Ibid.* ch. iv. 22.
[7] *Ibid.* ch. iv. 26.

himself. Having come to London to earn his bread, some people, seeing his convulsive grimaces, took him for an idiot; others, seeing his robust frame, advised him to buy a porter's knot.[1] For thirty years he worked like a hack for the publishers, whom he used to thrash when they became impertinent [2] always shabby, having once fasted two days;[3] content when he could dine on "a cut of meat for sixpence, and bread for a penny;"[4] having written *Rasselas* in eight nights, to pay for his mother's funeral. Now pensioned[5] by the king, freed from his daily labours, he gave way to his natural indolence, lying in bed often till mid-day and after. He is visited at that hour. We mount the stairs of a gloomy house on the north side of Fleet Street, the busy quarter of London, in a narrow and obscure court; and as we enter, we hear the scoldings of four old women and an old quack doctor, poor penniless creatures, bad in health and in disposition, whom he has rescued, whom he supports, who vex or insult him. We ask for the doctor, a negro opens the door; we gather round the master's bed; there are always many distinguished people at his levee, including even ladies. Thus surrounded, "he declaims, then went to dinner at a tavern, where he commonly stays late,"[6] talks all the evening, goes out to enjoy in the streets the London mud and fog, picks up a friend to talk again, and is

[1] *Life of Johnson*, ch. v. 28, note 2.
[2] *Ibid.* ch. vii. 46.
[3] *Ibid.* ch. xvii. 159.
[4] *Ibid.* ch. v. 28.
[5] He had formerly put in his *Dictionary* the following definition of the word pension: "*Pension*—an allowance made to any one without an equivalent. In England it is generally understood to mean pay given to a state-hireling for treason to his country." This drew of course afterwards all the sarcasms of his adversaries upon himself.
[6] Boswell's *Life*, ch. xxiv. 216.

busy pronouncing oracles and maintaining his opinion till four in the morning.

Whereupon we ask if it is the freedom of his opinions which is fascinating. His friends answer, that there is no more indomitable partisan of order. He is called the Hercules of Toryism. From infancy he detested the Whigs, and he never spoke of them but as public malefactors. He insults them even in his *Dictionary*. He exalts Charles the Second and James the Second as two of the best kings who have ever reigned.[1] He justifies the arbitrary taxes which Government presumes to levy on the Americans.[2] He declares that "Whiggism is a negation of all principle;"[3] that "the first Whig was the devil;"[4] that "the Crown has not power enough;"[5] that "mankind are happier in a state of inequality and subordination."[6] Frenchmen of the present time, admirers of the *Contrat Social*, soon feel, on reading or hearing all this, that they are no longer in France. And what must they feel when, a few moments later, the Doctor says: "I think him (Rousseau) one of the worst of men; a rascal who ought to be hunted out of society, as he has been. . . . I would sooner sign a sentence for his transportation, than that of any felon who has gone from the Old Bailey these many years. Yes, I should like to have him work in the plantations."[7] . . . .

It seems that in England people do not like philosophical innovators. Let us see if Voltaire will be treated better: "It is difficult to settle the proportion of

[1] Boswell's *Life*, ch. xlix. 444.
[2] *Ibid.* ch. xlviii. 435.
[3] *Ibid.* ch. xvi. 148.
[4] *Ibid.* ch. lxvi. 606.
[5] *Ibid.* ch. xxvi. 236.
[6] *Ibid.* ch. xxviii. 252.
[7] *Ibid.* ch. xix. 175.

iniquity between them (Rousseau and Voltaire)."[1] In good sooth, this is clear. But can we not look for truth outside an Established Church? No; "no honest man could be a Deist; for no man could be so after a fair examination of the proofs of Christianity."[2] Here is a peremptory Christian; there are scarcely any in France so decisive. Moreover, he is an Anglican, with a passion for the hierarchy, an admirer of established order, an enemy of Dissenters. We see him bow to an archbishop with peculiar veneration.[3] We hear him reprove one of his friends "for saying grace without mention of the name of our Lord Jesus Christ."[4] If we speak to him of a Quaker's meeting, and of a woman preaching, he will tell us that "a woman preaching is like a dog's walking on his hind legs; it is not done well, but you are surprised to find it done at all."[5] He is a Conservative, and does not fear being considered antiquated. He went at one o'clock in the morning into St. John's Church, Clerkenwell, to interrogate a tormented spirit, which had promised to "give a token of her presence there by a knock upon her coffin."[6] If we look at Boswell's life of him, we will find there fervent prayers, examinations of conscience, and rules of conduct. Amidst prejudices and ridicule he has a deep conviction, an active faith, a severe moral piety. He is a Christian from his heart and conscience, reason and practice. The thought of God, the fear of the last judgment, engross and reform him. He said one day to Garrick: "I'll come no more behind your scenes, David, for the silk stockings and white bosoms of your actresses

[1] Boswell's *Life*, ch. xix. 176.
[2] *Ibid.* ch. xix. 174.
[3] *Ibid.* ch. lxxv. 723.
[4] *Ibid.* ch. xxiv. 218.
[5] *Ibid.* ch. xvii. 157.
[6] *Ibid.* ch. xv. 138, note 3.

excite my amorous propensities." He reproaches himself with his indolence, implores God's pardon, is humble, has scruples. All this is very strange. We ask men what can please them in this grumbling bear, with the manners of a beadle and the inclinations of a constable? They answer, that in London people are less exacting than in Paris, as to manners and politeness; that in England they allow energy to be rude and virtue odd; that they put up with a combative conversation; that public opinion is all on the side of the constitution and Christianity; and that society was right to take for its master a man who, by his style and precepts, best suited its bent.

We now send for his books, and after an hour we observe, that whatever the work be, tragedy or dictionary, biography or essay, he always writes in the same style. "Dr. Johnson," Goldsmith said one day to him, "if you were to make little fishes talk, they would talk like whales."[1] In fact, his phraseology rolls ever in solemn and majestic periods, in which every substantive marches ceremoniously, accompanied by its epithet; grand, pompous words peal like an organ; every proposition is set forth balanced by a proposition of equal length; thought is developed with the compassed regularity and official splendour of a procession. Classical prose attains its perfection in him, as classical poetry in Pope. Art cannot be more finished, or nature more forced. No one has confined ideas in more strait compartments; none has given stronger relief to dissertation and proof; none has imposed more despotically on story and dialogue the forms of argumentation and violent declamation; none has

[1] Boswell's *Life*, ch. xxviii. 256.

more generally mutilated the flowing liberty of conversation and life by antitheses and technical words. It is the completion and the excess, the triumph and the tyranny of oratorical style.[1] We understand now that an oratorical age would recognise him as a master, and attribute to him in eloquence the mastery which it attributed to Pope in verse.

We wish to know what ideas have made him popular. Here the astonishment of a Frenchman redoubles. We vainly turn over the pages of his *Dictionary*, his eight volumes of essays, his many volumes of biographies, his numberless articles, his conversation so carefully collected; we yawn. His truths are too true; we already know his precepts by heart. We learn from him that life is short, and we ought to improve the few moments granted to us;[2] that a mother ought not to bring up her son as a fop; that a man ought to repent of his faults, and yet avoid superstition; that in everything we ought to be active, and not hurried. We thank him for these sage counsels, but we mutter to ourselves that we could have done very well without them. We should like to know who could have been the lovers of *ennui* who have bought up thirteen thousand copies of his works.

[1] Here is a celebrated phrase, which will give some idea of his style (Boswell's *Journal*, ch. xliii. 381): "We were now treading that illustrious island, which was once the luminary of the Caledonian regions, whence savage clans and roving barbarians derived the benefits of knowledge and the blessings of religion. To abstract the mind from all local emotion would be impossible if it were endeavoured, and would be foolish if it were possible. . . . Far from me and from my friends be such frigid philosophy as may conduct us indifferent and unmoved over any ground which has been dignified by wisdom, bravery, or virtue. That man is little to be envied, whose patriotism would not gain force upon the plain of Marathon, or whose piety would not grow warmer among the ruins of Iona."

[2] *Rambler*, 108, 109, 110, 111.

We then remember that sermons are liked in England, and that these *Essays* are sermons. We discover that men of reflection do not need bold or striking ideas, but palpable and profitable truths. They desire to be furnished with a useful provision of authentic examples on man and his existence, and demand nothing more. No matter if the idea is vulgar; meat and bread are vulgar too, and are no less good. They wish to be taught the kinds and degrees of happiness and unhappiness, the varieties and results of character and condition, the advantages and inconveniences of town and country, knowledge and ignorance, wealth and moderate circumstances, because they are moralists and utilitarians; because they look in a book for the knowledge to turn them from folly, and motives to confirm them in uprightness; because they cultivate in themselves sense, that is common, practical reason. A little fiction, a few portraits, the least amount of amusement, will suffice to adorn it. This substantial food only needs a very simple seasoning. It is not the novelty of the dishes, nor dainty cookery, but solidity and wholesomeness, which they seek. For this reason *Essays* are Johnson's national food. It is because they are insipid and dull for Frenchmen that they suit the taste of an Englishman. We understand now why they take for a favourite the respectable, the tiresome Dr. Samuel Johnson.

X.

I would fain bring together all these features, see these figures; only colours and forms complete an idea; in order to know, we must see. Let us go to the picture-gallery. Hogarth, the national painter, the friend of

WILLIAM HOGARTH

Fielding, the contemporary of Johnson, the exact imitator of manners, will show us the outward, as these authors have shown us the inward.

We enter these great galleries of art. Painting is a noble thing! It embellishes all, even vice. On the four walls, under transparent and brilliant glass, the torsos rise, flesh palpitates, the blood's warm current circulates under the veined skin, speaking likenesses stand out in the light; it seems that the ugly, the vulgar, the odious, have disappeared from the world. I no more criticise characters; I have done with moral rules. I am no longer tempted to approve or to hate. A man here is but a smudge of colour, at most a handful of muscles; I know no longer if he be a murderer.

Life, the happy, complete, overflowing display, the expansion of natural and corporal powers; this from all sides floods and rejoices our eyes. Our limbs instinctively move by contagious imitation of movements and forms. Before these lions of Rubens, whose deep growls rise like thunder to the mouth of the cave, before these colossal writhing torsos, these snouts which grope about skulls, the animal within us quivers through sympathy, and it seems as if we were about to emit from our chests a roar to equal their own.

What though art has degenerated even amongst Frenchmen, epigrammatists, the bepowdered abbés of the eighteenth century, it is art still. Beauty is gone, elegance remains. These pretty arch faces, these slender waspish waists, these delicate arms buried in a nest of lace, these careless wanderings amongst thickets and warbling fountains, these gallant dreams in a lofty chamber festooned with garlands, all this refined and coquettish society is still charming. The artist, then

as always, gathers the flower of things, and cares not for the rest.

But what was Hogarth's aim? who ever saw such a painter? Is he a painter? Others make us wish to see what they represent; he makes us wish not to see it.

Is there anything more agreeable to paint than a drunken debauch by night? the jolly, careless faces; the rich light, drowned in shadows which flicker over rumpled garments and weighed-down bodies. With Hogarth, on the other hand, what figures! Wickedness, stupidity, all the vile poison of the vilest human passions, drops and distils from them. One is shaking on his legs as he stands, sick, whilst a hiccup half opens his belching lips; another howls hoarsely, like a wretched cur; another, with bald and broken head, patched up in places, falls forward on his chest, with the smile of a sick idiot. We turn over the leaves of Hogarth's works, and the train of odious or bestial faces appears to be inexhaustible; features distorted or deformed, foreheads lumpy or puffed out with perspiring flesh, hideous grins distended by ferocious laughter: one has had his nose bitten off; the next, one-eyed, square-headed, spotted over with bleeding warts, whose red face looks redder under the dazzling white wig, smokes silently, full of rancour and spleen; another, an old man with a crutch, scarlet and bloated, his chin falling on his breast, gazes with the fixed and starting eyes of a crab. Hogarth shows the beast in man, and worse, a mad and murderous, a feeble or enraged beast. Look at this murderer standing over the body of his butchered mistress, with squinting eyes, distorted mouth, grinding his teeth at the thought of the blood which stains and

denounces him; or this ruined gambler, who has torn off his wig and kerchief, and is crying on his knees, with closed teeth, and fist raised against heaven. Look again at this madhouse: the dirty idiot, with muddy face, filthy hair, stained claws, who thinks he is playing on the violin, and has a sheet of music for a cap; the religious madman, who writhes convulsively on his straw, with clasped hands, feeling the claws of the devil in his bowels; the naked and haggard raving lunatic whom they are chaining up, and who is tearing out his flesh with his nails. Detestable Yahoos who presume to usurp the blessed light of heaven, in what brain can you have arisen, and why did a painter sully our eyes with your picture?

It is because his eyes were English, and because the senses in England are barbarous. Let us leave our repugnance behind us, and look at things as Englishmen do, not from without, but from within. The whole current of public thought tends here towards observation of the soul, and painting is dragged along with literature in the same course. Forget then the forms, they are but lines; the body is here only to translate the mind.[1] This twisted nose, these pimples on a vinous cheek, these stupefied gestures of a drowsy brute, these wrinkled features, these degraded forms, only make the character, the trade, the whim, the habit stand out more clearly. The artist shows us no longer limbs and heads, but debauchery, drunkenness, brutality, hatred, despair, all the diseases and deformities of these too harsh and

[1] When a character is strongly marked in the living face, it may be considered as an index to the mind, to express which with any degree of justness in painting, requires the utmost efforts of a great master.—*Analysis of Beauty.*

unbending wills, the mad menagerie of all the passions. Not that he lets them loose; this rude, dogmatic, and Christian citizen handles more vigorously than any of his brethren the heavy club of morality. He is a beef-eating policeman charged with instructing and correcting drunken pugilists. From such a man to such men ceremony would be superfluous. At the bottom of every cage where he imprisons a vice, he writes its name and adds the condemnation pronounced by Scripture; he displays that vice in its ugliness, buries it in its filth, drags it to its punishment, so that there is no conscience so perverted as not to recognise it, none so hardened as not to be horrified at it.

Let us look well, these are lessons which bear fruit. This one is against gin: on a step, in the open street, lies a drunken woman, half naked, with hanging breasts, scrofulous legs; she smiles idiotically, and her child, which she lets fall on the pavement, breaks its skull. Underneath, a pale skeleton, with closed eyes, sinks down with a glass in his hand. Round about, dissipation and frenzy drive the tattered spectres one against another. A wretch who has hung himself sways to and fro in a garret. Gravediggers are putting a naked woman into a coffin. A starveling is gnawing a bare bone side by side with a dog. By his side little girls are drinking with one another, and a young woman is making her suckling swallow gin. A madman pitchforks his child, and raises it aloft; he dances and laughs, and the mother sees it.

Another picture and lesson, this time against cruelty. A young murderer has been hung, and is being dissected. He is there, on a table, and the lecturer calmly points out with his wand the places where the students are to

work. At this sign the dissectors cut the flesh and pull. One is at the feet; the second man of science, a sardonic old butcher, seizes a knife with a hand that looks as if it would do its duty, and thrusts the other hand into the entrails, which, lower down, are being taken out to be put into a bucket. The last medical student takes out the eye, and the distorted mouth seems to howl under his hand. Meanwhile a dog seizes the heart, which is trailing on the ground; thigh-bones and skull boil, by way of concert, in a copper; and the doctors around coolly exchange surgical jokes on the subject which, piecemeal, is passing away under their scalpels.

Frenchmen will say that such lessons are good for barbarians, and that they only half-like these official or lay preachers, De Foe, Hogarth, Smollett, Richardson, Johnson, and the rest. I reply that moralists are useful, and that these have changed a state of barbarism into one of civilisation.

CHAPTER VII.

The Poets.

I.

When we take in at one view the vast literary region in England, extending from the restoration of the Stuarts to the French Revolution, we perceive that all the productions, independently of the English character, bear a classical impress, and that this impress, special to this region, is met with neither in the preceding nor in the succeeding time. This dominant form of thought is imposed on all writers from Waller to Johnson, from Hobbes and Temple to Robertson and Hume: there is an art to which they all aspire; the work of a hundred and fifty years, practice and theory, inventions and imitations, examples and criticism, are employed in attaining it. They comprehend only one kind of beauty; they establish only the precepts which may produce it; they re-write, translate, and disfigure on its pattern the great works of other ages; they carry it into all the different kinds of literature, and succeed or fail in them according as it is adapted to them or not. The sway of this style is so absolute, that it is imposed on the greatest, and condemns them to impotence when they would apply it beyond its domain. The possession of this style is so universal, that it is met with in the weakest authors and raises them to the height of talent,

when they apply it in its domain.[1] This it is which brings to perfection prose, discourse, essay, dissertation, narration, and all the productions which form part of conversation and eloquence. This it is which destroyed the old drama, debased the new, impoverished and diverted poetry, produced a correct, agreeable, sensible, colourless, and narrow-minded history. This spirit, common to England and France, impressed its form on an infinite diversity of literary works, so that in its universal manifest ascendency we cannot but recognise the presence of one of those internal forces which bend and govern the course of human genius.

In no branch was it displayed more manifestly than in poetry, and at no time did it appear more clearly than in the reign of Queen Anne. The poets have just attained to the art which they had before dimly discerned. For sixty years they were approaching it; now they possess it, handle it; they use and exaggerate it. The style is at the same time finished and artificial. Let us open the first that comes to hand, Parnell or Philips, Addison or Prior, Gay or Tickell, we find a certain turn of mind, versification, language. Let us pass to a second, the same form reappears; we might say that they were imitations of one another. Let us go on to a third; the same diction, the same apostrophes, the same fashion of arranging an epithet and rounding a period. Let us turn over the whole lot; with little individual differences, they seem to be all cast in the same mould; one is more epicurean, another more moral, another more biting; but a noble language, an oratorical pomp, a classical correctness, reign through-

[1] Paul Louis Courier (1772-1825) says, "a lady's maid, in Louis XIV's. time, wrote better than the greatest of modern writers."

out; the substantive is accompanied by its adjective, its knight of honour; antithesis balances its symmetrical architecture; the verb, as in Lucan or Statius, is displayed, flanked on each side by a noun decorated by an epithet; we would say that it is of a uniform make, as if fabricated by a machine; we forget what it wishes to make known; we are tempted to count the measure on our fingers; we know beforehand what poetical ornaments are to embellish it. There is a theatrical dressing, contrasts, allusions, mythological elegance, Greek or Latin quotations. There is a scholastic solidity, sententious maxims, philosophic commonplaces, moral developments, oratorical exactness. We might imagine ourselves to be before a family of plants; if the size, colour, accessories, names differ, the fundamental type does not vary; the stamens are of the same number, similarly inserted around similar pistils, above leaves arranged on the same plan; a man who knows one knows all; there is a common organism and structure which involves the uniformity of the rest. If we review the whole family, we will doubtless find there some characteristic plant which displays the type in a clear light, whilst all around it and by degrees it alters, degenerates, and at last loses itself in the surrounding families. So here we see classical art find its centre in the neighbours of Pope, and above all in Pope himself; then, after being half effaced, mingle with foreign elements until it disappears in the poetry which succeeded it.[1]

[1] The Rev. Whitwell Elwin, in his second volume of the *Works of Alexander Pope*, at the end of his introduction to *An Essay on Man*, p. 338, says: "M. Taine asserts that from the Restoration to the French Revolution, from Waller to Johnson, from Hobbes and Temple

II.

In 1688, at a linen draper's in Lombard Street, London, was born a little, delicate, and sickly creature, by nature artificial, constituted beforehand for a studious existence, having no taste but for books, who from his early youth derived his whole pleasure from the contemplation of printed books. He copied the letters, and thus learned to write. He passed his infancy with them, and was a verse-maker as soon as he knew how to speak. At the age of twelve he had written a little tragedy out of the *Iliad*, and an *Ode on Solitude*. From thirteen to fifteen he composed a long epic of four thousand verses, called *Alcander*. For eight years shut up in a little house in Windsor Forest, he read all the best critics, almost all the English, Latin, and French poets who had a reputation, Homer, the Greek poets, and a few of the great ones in the original, Tasso and Ariosto in translations, with such assiduity, that he nearly died from it. He did not search in them for passions, but style: there was never a more devoted adorer, never a more precocious master of form. Already his taste showed itself: amongst all

to Robertson and Hume, all our literature, both prose and verse, bears the impress of classic art. The mode, he says, culminated in the reign of Queen Anne, and Pope, he considers, was the extreme example of it. . . . Many of the most eminent authors who flourished between the English Restoration wrote in a style far removed from that which M. Taine calls classical. . . . The verse differs like the prose, though in a less degree, and is not "of a uniform make, as if fabricated by a machine." . . . Neither is the substance of the prose and verse, from the Restoration to the French Revolution, an invariable common-sense mediocrity. . . . There is much truth in his (M. Taine's) view, that there was a growing tendency to cultivate style, and in some writers the art degenerated into the artificial."—TR.

the English poets his favourite was Dryden, the least inspired and the most classical. He perceived his career. He states that Mr. Walsh told him there was one way left of excelling. "We had several great poets," he said, "but we never had one great poet that was correct; and he advised me to make that my study and aim."[1] He followed this advice, tried his hand in translations of Ovid and Statius, and in recasting parts of old Chaucer. He appropriated all the poetic elegancies and excellences, stored them up in his memory; he arranged in his head a complete dictionary of all happy epithets, all ingenious turns of expression, all sonorous rhythms by which a poet may exalt, render precise, illuminate an idea. He was like those little musicians, infant prodigies, who, brought up at the piano, suddenly acquire a marvellous touch, roll out scales, brilliant shakes, make the octaves vault with an agility and accuracy which drive off the stage the most famous performers. At seventeen, becoming acquainted with old Wycherley, who was sixty-nine, he undertook, at his request, to correct his poems, and corrected them so well, that the other was at once charmed and mortified. Pope blotted out, added, recast, spoke frankly, and eliminated firmly. The author, in spite of himself, admired the corrections secretly, and tried openly to make light of them, until at last his vanity, wounded at owing so much to so young a man, and at finding a master in a scholar, ended by breaking off an intercourse by which he profited and suffered too much. For the scholar had at the outset carried the art beyond any of the masters. At sixteen[2] his Pastorals bore witness to

[1] R. Carruthers, *Life of Alexander Pope*, 2d ed. 1857, ch. i. 33.

[2] It is very doubtful whether Pope was not older than sixteen when

a correctness which no one had possessed, not even Dryden. When people observed these choice words, these exquisite arrangements of melodious syllables, this science of division and rejection, this style so fluent and pure, these graceful images rendered still more graceful by the diction, and all this artificial and many-tinted garland of flowers which Pope called pastoral, they thought of the first eclogues of Virgil. Mr. Walsh declared "that it is not flattery at all to say that Virgil had written nothing so good at his age."[1] When later they appeared in a volume, the public was dazzled. "You have only displeased the critics," wrote Wycherley, "by pleasing them too well."[2] The same year the poet of twenty-one finished his *Essay on Criticism*, a sort of *Ars Poetica:* it is the kind of poem a man might write at the end of his career, when he has handled all modes of writing, and has grown grey in criticism; and in this subject, of which the treatment demands the experience of a whole literary life, he was at the first onset as ripe as Boileau.

What will this consummate musician, who begins by a treatise on harmony, make of his incomparable mechanism and his science as a teacher? It is well to feel and think before writing; a full source of living ideas and real passions is necessary to make a genuine poet, and in him, seen closely, we find that everything, to his very person, is scanty and artificial; he was a dwarf, four feet high, contorted, hunchbacked, thin, valetudinarian, appearing, when he arrived at maturity, no longer capable of existing. He could not get up

he wrote the Pastorals. See, on this subject, Pope's Works, ed. Elwin, London 1871, i. 239 *et passim.*—TR.

[1] Pope's Works, ed. Elwin, i. 233. [2] *Ibid.* i. 242.

himself, a woman dressed him; he wore three pairs of stockings, drawn on one over the other, so slender were his legs; "when he rose, he was invested in bodice made of stiff canvas, being scarce able to hold himself erect till they were laced, and he then put on a flannel waistcoat;"[1] next came a sort of fur doublet, for the least thing made him shiver; and lastly, a thick linen shirt, very warm, with fine sleeves. Over all this he wore a black garment, a tye-wig, a little sword; thus equipped, he went and took his place at the table of his great friend, the Earl of Oxford. He was so small, that he had to be raised on a chair of his own; so bald, that when he had no company he covered his head with a velvet cap; so punctilious and exacting, that the footmen evaded going his errands, and the Earl had to discharge several "for their resolute refusal of his messages." At dinner he ate too much; like a spoiled child, he would have highly seasoned dishes, and thus "would oppress his stomach with repletion." When cordials were offered him, he got angry, but did not refuse them. He had all the appetite and whims of an old child, an old invalid, an old author, an old bachelor. We are prepared to find him whimsical and susceptible. He often, without saying a word, and without any known cause, quitted the house of Lord Oxford, and the footmen had to go repeatedly with messages to bring him back. If Lady Mary Wortley, his former poetical divinity, were unfortunately at table, there was no dining in peace; they would not fail to contradict, peck at each other, quarrel; and one or other would leave the room. He would be sent for

[1] Johnson, *Lives of the most eminent English Poets*, 3 vols., ed. Cunningham, 1854 A. Pope, iii. 96.

and would return, but he brought his hobbies back with him. He was as crafty and malignant as a nervous abortion, which he was; when he wanted anything, he dared not ask for it plainly; with hints and contrivances of speech he induced people to mention it, to bring it forward, after which he would make use of it. "Thus he teased Lord Orrery till he obtained a screen. He hardly drank tea without a stratagem. Lady Bolingbroke used to say that 'he played the politician about cabbages and turnips.'"[1]

The rest of his life is not much more noble. He wrote libels on the Duke of Chandos, Aaron Hill, Lady Mary Wortley, and then lied or equivocated to disavow them. He had an ugly liking for artifice, and played a disloyal trick on Lord Bolingbroke, his greatest friend. He was never frank, always acting a part; he aped the *blasé* man, the impartial great artist, a contemner of the great, of kings, of poetry itself. The truth is, that he thought of nothing but his phrases, his author's reputation, and "a little regard shown him by the Prince of Wales melted his obduracy."[2] When we read his correspondence, we find that there are not more than about ten genuine letters; he is a literary man even in the moments when he opened his heart; his confidences are formal rhetoric; and when he conversed with a friend he was always thinking of the printer, who would give his effusions to the public. Through this very pretentiousness he grew awkward, and unmasked himself. One day Richardson and his father, the painter, found him reading a pamphlet that Cibber had written against him. "These things," said

[1] Johnson, *Lives of the most eminent English Poets;* A. Pope, iii. 99.
[2] Boswell's *Life of Johnson*, ch. lxxi. 670.

Pope, "are my diversion." "They sat by him while he perused it, and saw his features writhing with anguish; and young Richardson said to his father, when they returned, that he hoped to be preserved from such diversion."[1] After all, his great cause for writing was literary vanity: he wished to be admired, and nothing more; his life was that of a coquette studying herself in a glass, painting her face, smirking, receiving compliments from any one, yet declaring that compliments weary her, that paint makes her dirty, and that she has a horror of affectation. Pope has no dash, no naturalness or manliness; he has no more ideas than passions; at least such ideas as a man feels it necessary to write, and in connection with which we lose thought of words. Religious controversy and party quarrels resound about him; he studiously avoids them; amidst all these shocks his chief care is to preserve his writing-desk; he is a very lukewarm Catholic, all but a deist, not well aware what deism means; and on this point he borrows from Bolingbroke ideas whose scope he cannot see, but which he thinks suitable to be put into verse. In a letter to Atterbury (1717) he says: "In my politics, I think no further than how to prefer the peace of my life, in any government under which I live; nor in my religion, than to preserve the peace of my conscience in any church with which I communicate. I hope all churches and governments are so far of God, as they are rightly understood and rightly administered; and where they err, or may be wrong, I leave it to God alone to mend or reform them."[2] Such convictions do not torment a man. In reality, he did not write because he thought, but

[1] Carruthers' *Life of Pope*, ch. x. 377. [2] *Ibid.* ch. iv. 164.

thought in order to write; manuscript and the noise it makes in the world, when printed, was his idol; if he wrote verses, it was merely for the sake of doing so.

This is the best training for versification. Pope gave himself up to it; he was a man of leisure, his father had left him a very fair fortune; he earned a large sum by translating the *Iliad* and *Odyssey;* he had an income of eight hundred pounds. He was never in the pay of a publisher, he looked from an eminence upon the beggarly authors grovelling in their free and easy life, and, calmly seated in his pretty house at Twickenham, in his grotto, or in the fine garden which he had himself planned, he could polish and file his writings as long as he chose. He did not fail to do so. When he had written a work, he kept it at least two years in his desk. From time to time he re-read and corrected it; took counsel of his friends, then of his enemies; no new edition was unamended; he altered without wearying. His first outburst became so recast and transformed, that it could not be recognised in the final copy. The pieces which seem least retouched are two satires, and Dodsley says that in the manuscript "almost every line was written twice over; I gave him a clean transcript, which he sent some time afterwards to me for the press, with almost every line written twice over a second time."[1] Dr. Johnson says: "From his attention to poetry he was never diverted. If conversation offered anything that could be improved, he committed it to paper; if a thought, or perhaps an expression, more happy than was common, rose to his mind, he was careful to write it; an independent distich was preserved for an opportunity of insertion;

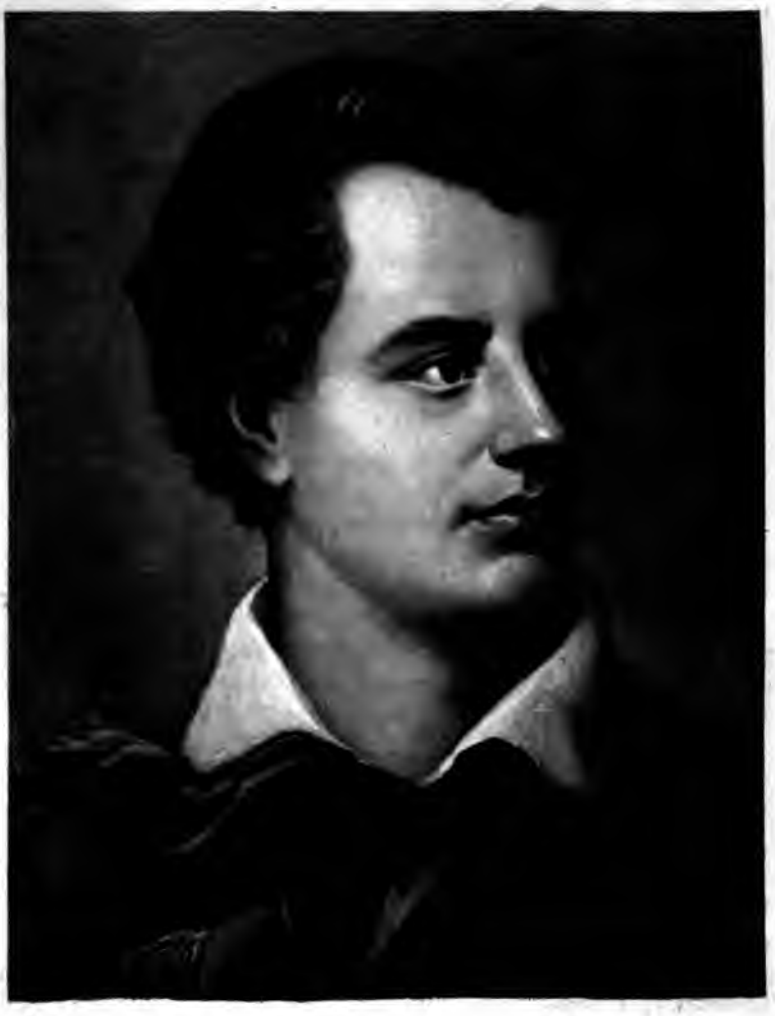
[1] Johnson, *The Lives of the English Poets;* Alexander Pope, iii. 114.

and some little fragments have been found containing lines, or parts of lines, to be wrought upon at some other time."[1] His writing-desk had to be placed upon his bed before he rose. "Lord Oxford's domestic related that, in the dreadful winter of 1740, she was called from her bed by him four times in one night to supply him with paper, lest he should lose a thought."[2] Swift complains that he was never at leisure for conversation, because he "had always some poetical scheme in his head." Thus nothing was lacking for the attainment of perfect expression; the practice of a lifetime, the study of every model, an independent fortune, the company of men of the world, an immunity from turbulent passions, the absence of dominant ideas, the facility of an infant prodigy, the assiduity of an old man of letters. It seems as though he were expressly endowed with faults and good qualities, here enriched, there impoverished, at once narrowed and developed, to set in relief the classical form by the diminution of the classical depth, to present the public with a model of a worn-out and accomplished art, to reduce to a brilliant and rigid crystal the flowing sap of an expiring literature.

III.

It is a great misfortune for a poet to know his business too well; his poetry then shows the man of business, and not the poet. I wish I could admire Pope's works of imagination, but I cannot. In vain I read the testimony of his contemporaries, and even that of the moderns, and repeat to myself that in his time

[1] Johnson, *The Lives of the English Poets;* Alexander Pope, iii. 111.
[2] *Ibid.* iii. 105.



LORD BYRON

he was the prince of poets; that his Epistle from *Eloisa to Abelard* was received with a cry of enthusiasm; that a man could not then imagine a finer expression of true passion; that to this very day it is learned by heart, like the speech of Hippolyte in the *Phèdre* of Racine; that Johnson, the great literary critic, ranked it amongst "the happiest productions of the human mind;" that Lord Byron himself preferred it to the celebrated ode of Sappho. I read it again and am bored: this is not as it ought to be; but, in spite of myself, I yawn, and I open the original letters of Eloisa to find the cause of my weariness.

Doubtless poor Eloisa is a barbarian, nay worse a literary barbarian; she puts down learned quotations, arguments, tries to imitate Cicero, to arrange her periods; she could not do otherwise, writing a dead language, with an acquired style; perhaps the reader would do as much if he were obliged to write to his mistress in Latin.[1] But how does true feeling pierce through the scholastic form! "Thou art the only one who can sadden me, console me, make me joyful. . . . I should be happier and prouder to be called thy mistress than to be the lawful wife of an emperor. . . Never, God knows, have I wished for anything else in thee but thee. It is thee alone whom I desire; nothing that thou couldst give; not marriage, not dowry: I never

[1] Rev. W. Elwin, in his edition of Pope's Works, ii. 224, says: "The authenticity of the Latin letters has usually been taken for granted, but I have a strong belief that they are a forgery. . . . It is far more likely that they are the fabrication of an unconcerned romancer, who speaks in the name of others with a latitude which people, not entirely degraded, would never adopt towards themselves. The suspicion is strengthened when the second party to the correspondence, the chief philosopher of his generation, exhibits the same exceptional depravity of taste."—TR.

dreamt of doing my own pleasure or my own will, thou knowest it, but thine." Then come passionate words, genuine love words,[1] then the unrestrained words of a penitent, who says and dares everything, because she wishes to be cured, to show her wound to her confessor, even her most shameful wound; perhaps also because in extreme agony, as in child-birth, modesty vanishes. All this is very crude, very rude; Pope has more wit than she, and how he endues her with it! In his hands she becomes an academician, and her letter is a repertory of literary effects. Portraits and descriptions; she paints to Abelard the nunnery and the landscape:

> "In these lone walls (their days eternal bound),
> These moss-grown domes with spiry turrets crowned,
> Where awful arches make a noon-day night,
> And the dim windows shed a solemn light. . . .
> The wandering streams that shine between the hills,
> The grots that echo to the tinkling rills,
> The dying gales that pant upon the trees,
> The lakes that quiver to the curling breeze."[2]

Declamation and commonplace: she sends Abelard discourses on love and the liberty which it demands, on the cloister and the peaceful life which it affords, on writing and the advantages of the post.[3] Antitheses

[1] "Vale, unice."

[2] Pope's Works, ed. Elwin; *Eloisa to Abelard*, ii. 245, *l.* 141-160.

[3] *Eloisa to Abelard*, ii. 240, *l.* 51-58:

> "Heav'n first taught letters for some wretch's aid,
> Some banished lover, or some captive maid;
> They live, they speak, they breathe what love inspires,
> Warm from the soul, and faithful to its fires,
> The virgin's wish without her fears impart,
> Excuse the blush, and pour out all the heart,
> Speed the soft intercourse from soul to soul,
> And waft a sigh from Indus to the Pole."

and contrasts, she forwards them to Abelard by the dozen; a contrast between the convent illuminated by his presence and desolate by his absence, between the tranquillity of the pure nun and the anxiety of the sinful nun, between the dream of human happiness and the dream of divine happiness. In fine, it is a *bravura*, with contrasts of *forte* and *piano*, variations and change of key. Eloisa makes the most of her theme, and sets herself to crowd into it all the powers and effects of her voice. Admire the *crescendo*, the shakes by which she ends her brilliant *morceaux*; to transport the hearer at the close of the portrait of the innocent nun, she says:

"How happy is the blameless vestal's lot!
The world forgetting, by the world forgot:
Eternal sunshine of the spotless mind!
Each prayer accepted and each wish resigned;
Labour and rest, that equal periods keep;
'Obedient slumbers that can wake and weep;'
Desires composed, affections ever even;
Tears that delight, and sighs that waft to heav'n.
Grace shines around her with serenest beams,
And whisp'ring angels prompt her golden dreams.
For her, th' unfading rose of Eden blooms,
And wings of seraphs shed divine perfumes,
For her the spouse prepares the bridal ring,
For her white virgins hymeneals sing,
To sounds of heavenly harps she dies away,
And melts in visions of eternal day."[1]

Observe the noise of the big drum; I mean the grand contrivances, for so may be called all that a person says who wishes to rave and cannot; for instance, speaking

[1] *Eloisa to Abelard*, ii. 249, *l.* 207-222.

to rocks and walls, praying the absent Abelard to come, fancying him present, apostrophising grace and virtue:

> O grace serene! O virtue heavenly fair!
> Divine oblivion of low-thoughted care!
> Fresh-blooming hope, gay daughter of the sky!
> And faith, our early immortality!
> Enter, each mild, each amicable guest;
> Receive, and wrap me in eternal rest!"[1]

Hearing the dead speaking to her, telling the angels:

> "I come! I come! Prepare your roseate bow'rs,
> Celestial palms, and ever-blooming flow'rs."[2]

This is the final symphony with modulations of the celestial organ. I presume that Abelard cried "Bravo" when he heard it.

But this is nothing in comparison with the art exhibited by her in every phrase. She puts ornaments into every line. Imagine an Italian singer trilling every word. O what pretty sounds! how nimbly and brilliantly they roll along, how clear, and always exquisite! it is impossible to reproduce them in another tongue. Now it is a happy image, filling up a whole phrase; now a series of verses, full of symmetrical contrasts; two ordinary words set in relief by strange conjunction; an imitative rhythm completing the impression of the mind by the emotion of the senses; the most elegant comparisons and the most picturesque epithets; the closest style and the most ornate. Except truth, nothing is wanting. Eloisa is worse than a singer, she is an author: we look at the back of her epistle to Abelard to see if she has not written on it "For Press."

[1] *Eloisa to Abelard*, ii. 254, *l.* 297-302. [2] *Ibid.* 255, *l.* 317.

Pope has somewhere given a receipt for making an epic poem: take a storm, a dream, five or six battles, three sacrifices, funeral games, a dozen gods in two divisions; shake together until there rises the froth of a lofty style. We have just seen the receipt for making a love-letter. This kind of poetry resembles cookery; neither heart nor genius is necessary to produce it, but a light hand, an attentive eye, and a cultivated taste.

It seems that this kind of talent is made for light verses. It is factitious, and so are the manners of society. To make pretty speeches, to prattle with ladies, to speak elegantly of their chocolate or their fan, to jeer at fools, to criticise the last tragedy, to be good at insipid compliments or epigrams,—this, it seems, is the natural employment of a mind such as this, but slightly impassioned, very vain, a perfect master of style, as careful of his verses as a dandy of his coat. Pope wrote the *Rape of the Lock* and the *Dunciad;* his contemporaries went into ecstasies about the charm of his badinage and the precision of his raillery, and believed that he had surpassed Boileau's *Lutrin* and *Satires.*

That may well be; at all events the praise would be scanty. In Boileau there are, as a rule, two kinds of verse, as was said by a man of wit;[1] most of which seem to be those of a sharp schoolboy in the third class, the rest those of a good schoolboy in the upper division. Boileau wrote the second verse before the first: this is why once out of four times his first verse only serves to stop a gap. Doubtless Pope had a more brilliant and adroit mechanism; but this facility of hand does not suffice to make a poet, even a poet of the boudoir.

[1] M. Guillaume Guizot.

There, as elsewhere, we need genuine passion, or at least genuine taste. When we wish to paint the pretty nothings of conversation and the world, we must at least like them. We can only paint well what we love.[1] Is there no charming grace in the prattle and frivolity of a pretty woman? Painters, like Watteau, have spent their lives in feasting on them. A lock of hair raised by the wind, a pretty arm peeping from underneath a great deal of lace, a stooping figure making the bright folds of a petticoat sparkle, and the arch, half-engaging, half-mocking smile of the pouting mouth,—these are enough to transport an artist. Certainly he will be aware of the influence of the toilet, as much so as the lady herself, and will never scold her for passing three hours at her glass; there is poetry in elegance. He enjoys it as a picture; delights in the refinements of worldly life, the grand quiet lines of the lofty, wainscoted drawing-room, the soft reflection of the high mirrors and glittering porcelain, the careless gaiety of the little sculptured Loves, locked in embrace above the mantelpiece, the silvery sound of these soft voices, buzzing scandal round the tea-table. Pope hardly if at all rejoices in them; he is satirical and English amidst this amiable luxury, introduced from France. Although he is the most worldly of English poets, he is not enough so: nor is the society around him. Lady Mary Wortley Montague, who was in her time "the pink of fashion," and who is compared to Madame de Sévigné, has such a serious mind, such a decided style, such a precise judgment, and such a harsh sarcasm, that we would take her for a man. In reality the

[1] Goethe sings—"Liebe sei vor allen Dingen,
Unser Thema, wenn wir singen."

English, even Lord Chesterfield and Horace Walpole, never mastered the true tone of the *salon*. Pope is like them; his voice is out of tune, and then suddenly becomes biting. Every instant a harsh mockery blots out the graceful images which he began to awaken. Consider *The Rape of the Lock* as a whole; it is a buffoonery in a noble style. Lord Petre had cut off a lock of hair of a fashionable beauty, Mrs. Arabella Fermor; out of this trifle the problem is to make an epic, with invocations, apostrophes, the intervention of supernatural beings, and the rest of poetic mechanism; the solemnity of style contrasts with the littleness of the events; we laugh at these bickerings as at insects quarrelling. Such has always been the case in England; whenever Englishmen wish to represent social life, it is with a superficial and assumed politeness; at the bottom of their admiration there is scorn. Their insipid compliments conceal a mental reservation; let us observe them well, and we will see that they look upon a pretty, well-dressed, and coquettish woman as a pink doll, fit to amuse people for half-an-hour by her outward show. Pope dedicates his poem to Mrs. Arabella Fermor with every kind of compliment. The truth is, he is not polite; a Frenchwoman would have sent him back his book, and advised him to learn manners; for one commendation of her beauty she would find ten sarcasms upon her frivolity. Is it very pleasant to have it said: "You have the prettiest eyes in the world, but you live in the pursuit of trifles?" Yet to this all his homage is reduced.[1] His complimentary emphasis, his declaration that the "ravish'd

[1] See his *Epistle of the Characters of Women*. According to Pope, this character is composed of love of pleasure and love of power.

hair . . . adds new glory to the shining sphere,"[1] all his stock of phrases is but a parade of gallantry which betrays indelicacy and coarseness. Will she

> "Stain her honour, or her new brocade,
> Forget her pray'rs or miss a masquerade,
> Or lose her heart, or necklace at a ball?"[2]

No Frenchman of the eighteenth century would have imagined such a compliment. At most, that bearish Rousseau, that former lackey and Geneva moralist, might have delivered this disagreeable thrust. In England it was not found too rude. Mrs. Arabella Fermor was so pleased with the poem, that she gave away copies of it. Clearly she was not hard to please, for she had heard much worse compliments. If we read in Swift the literal transcript of a fashionable conversation, we shall see that a woman of fashion of that time could endure much before she was angry.

But the strangest thing is, that this trifling is, for Frenchmen at least, no badinage at all. It is not at all like lightness or gaiety. Dorat, Gresset, would have been stupefied and shocked by it. We remain cold under its most brilliant hits. Now and then at most a crack of the whip arouses us, but not to laughter. These caricatures seem strange to us, but do not amuse. The wit is no wit: all is calculated, combined, artificially prepared; we expect flashes of lightning, but at the last moment they do not descend. Thus Lord Petre, to "implore propitious heaven, and every power,"

> "To Love an altar built
> Of twelve vast French romances, neatly gilt.

[1] *Rape of the Lock*, c. v. 181, *l.* 141. [2] *Ibid.* c. ii. 156, *l.* 107.

There lay three garters, half a pair of gloves,
And all the trophies of his former loves;
With tender billets-doux he lights the pyre,
And breathes three am'rous sighs to raise the fire."[1]

We remain disappointed, not seeing the comicality of the description. We go on conscientiously, and in the picture of Melancholy and her palace find figures much stranger:

"Here sighs a jar, and there a goose-pye talks;
Men proved with child, as pow'rful fancy works,
And maids turned bottles, call aloud for corks."[2]

We say to ourselves now that we are in China; that so far from Paris and Voltaire we must be surprised at nothing, that these folk have ears different from ours, and that a Pekin mandarin vastly relishes kettle-music. Finally, we comprehend that, even in this correct age and this artificial poetry, the old style of imagination exists; that it is nourished as before, by oddities and contrasts; and that taste, in spite of all culture, will never become acclimatised; that incongruities, far from shocking, delight it; that it is insensible to French sweetness and refinements; that it needs a succession of expressive figures, unexpected and grinning, to pass before it; that it prefers this coarse carnival to delicate insinuations; that Pope belongs to his country, in spite of his classical polish and his studied elegances, and that his unpleasant and vigorous fancy is akin to that of Swift.

We are now prepared and can enter upon his second poem, *The Dunciad*. We need much self-command not to throw down this masterpiece as insipid, and even

[1] *Rape of the Lock*, c. ii. 153, *l.* 37-42. [2] *Ibid.* c. iv. 169, *l.* 52.

disgusting. Rarely has so much talent been spent to produce greater tedium. Pope wished to be avenged on his literary enemies, and sang of Dulness, the sublime goddess of literature, "daughter of Chaos and eternal Night, . . . gross as her sire, and as her mother grave,"[1] queen of hungry authors, who chooses for her son and favourite, first Theobald and afterwards Cibber. There he is, a king, and to celebrate his accession she institutes public games in imitation of the ancients; first a race of booksellers, trying to seize a poet; then the struggle of the authors, who first vie with each other in braying, and then dash into the Fleet-ditch filth; then the strife of critics, who have to undergo the reading of two voluminous authors, without falling asleep.[2] Strange parodies, to be sure, and in truth not very striking. Who is not deafened by these hackneyed and bald allegories, Dulness, poppies, mists, and Sleep? What if I entered into details, and described the poetess offered for a prize, "with cow-like udders, and with ox-like eyes;" if I related the plunges of the authors, floundering in the Fleet-ditch, the vilest sewer in the town; if I transcribed all the extraordinary verses in which

> "First he relates, how sinking to the chin,
> Smit with his mien, the mud-nymphs suck'd him in:
> How young Lutetia, softer than the down,
> Nigrina black, and Merdamante brown,
> Vied for his love in jetty bow'rs below." . . .[3]

I must stop. Swift alone might have seemed capable of writing some passages, for instance that on the fall of Curl. We might have excused it in Swift; the ex-

[1] Pope's Works, *The Dunciad*, bk. i. [2] *Ibid.* bk. ii. [3] *Ibid.*

tremity of despair, the rage of misanthropy, the approach of madness, might have carried him to such excess. But Pope, who lived calm and admired in his villa, and who was only urged by literary rancour! He can have had no nerves! How could a poet have dragged his talent wantonly through such images, and so constrained his ingeniously woven verses to receive such dirt? Picture a pretty drawing-room basket, destined only to contain flowers and fancy-work, sent down to the kitchen to be turned into a receptacle for filth. In fact, all the filth of literary life is here; and heaven knows what it then was! In no age were hack-writers so beggarly and so vile. Poor fellows, like Richard Savage, who slept during one winter in the open air on the cinders of a glass manufactory, lived on what he received for a dedication, knew the inside of a prison, rarely dined, and drank at the expense of his friends; pamphleteers like Tutchin, who was soundly whipped; plagiarists like Ward, exposed in the pillory and pelted with rotten eggs and apples; courtesans like Eliza Heywood, notorious by the shamelessness of their public confessions; bought journalists, hired slanderers, vendors of scandal and insults, half rogues, complete roysterers, and all the literary vermin which haunted the gambling-houses, the stews, the gin-cellars, and at a signal from a bookseller stung honest folk for a crownpiece. These villanies, this foul linen, the greasy coat six years old, the musty pudding, and the rest, are to be found in Pope as in Hogarth, with English coarseness and precision. This is their error, they are realists, even under the classical wig; they do not disguise what is ugly and mean; they describe that ugliness and meanness with their exact outlines and distinguishing marks; they do

not clothe them in a fine cloak of general ideas; they do not cover them with the pretty innuendoes of society. This is the reason why their satires are so harsh. Pope does not flog the dunces, he knocks them down; his poem is hard and malicious; it is so much so, that it becomes clumsy: to add to the punishment of dunces, he begins at the deluge, writes historical passages, represents at length the past, present, and future empire of Dulness, the library of Alexandria burned by Omar, learning extinguished by the invasion of the barbarians and by the superstition of the middle-age, the empire of stupidity which extends over England and will swallow it up. What paving-stones to crush flies!

> "See skulking Truth to her old cavern fled,
> Mountains of casuistry heap'd o'er her head!
> Philosophy, that leaned on Heav'n before,
> Shrinks to her second cause, and is no more.
> Physic of Metaphysic begs defence,
> And Metaphysic calls for aid on sense! . . .
> Religion blushing veils her sacred fires,
> And unawares Morality expires.
> Nor public flame, nor private, dares to shine;
> Nor human spark is left, nor glimpse divine!
> Lo! thy dread empire, Chaos! is restored;
> Light dies before thy uncreating word:
> Thy hand, great anarch! lets the curtain fall;
> And universal darkness buries all."[1]

The last scene ends with noise, cymbals and trombones, crackers and fireworks. As for me, I carry away from this celebrated entertainment only the remembrance of a hubbub. Unwittingly I have counted the lights, I

[1] *The Dunciad*, the end.

know the machinery, I have touched the toilsome stage-property of apparitions and allegories. I bid farewell to the scene-painter, the machinist, the manager of literary effects, and go elsewhere to find the poet.

IV.

However a poet exists in Pope, and to discover him we have only to read him by fragments; if the whole is, as a rule, wearisome or shocking, the details are admirable. It is so at the close of every literary age. Pliny the younger, and Seneca, so affected and so stiff, are charming in small bits; each of their phrases, taken by itself, is a masterpiece; each verse in Pope is a masterpiece when taken alone. At this time, and after a hundred years of culture, there is no movement, no object, no action, which poets cannot describe. Every aspect of nature was observed; a sunrise, a landscape reflected in the water,[1] a breeze amid the foliage, and so forth. Ask Pope to paint in verse an eel, a perch, or a trout; he has the exact phrase ready; we might glean from him the contents of a "Gradus." He gives the features so exactly, that at once we think we see the thing; he gives the expression so copiously, that our imagination, however obtuse, will end by seeing it. He marks everything in the flight of a pheasant:

> "See! from the brake the whirring pheasant springs
> And mounts exulting on triumphant wings. . . .

[1] Pope's Works, i. 352; *Windsor Forest*, *l.* 211.

> "Oft in her glass the musing shepherd spies
> The headlong mountains and the downward skies,
> The wat'ry landscape of the pendant woods,
> And absent trees that tremble in the floods.'

Ah! what avail his glossy, varying dyes,
His purple crest, and scarlet-circled eyes,
The vivid green his shining plumes unfold,
His painted wings, and breast that flames with gold?"[1]

He possesses the richest store of words to depict the sylphs which flutter round his heroine, Belinda:

"But now secure the painted vessel glides,
The sunbeams trembling on the floating tides:
While melting music steals upon the sky,
And softened sounds along the waters die;
Smooth flow the waves, the zephyrs gently play, . . .
The lucid squadrons round the sails repair:
Soft o'er the shrouds the aerial whispers breathe,
That seemed but zephyrs to the train beneath.
Some to the sun their insect-wings unfold,
Waft on the breeze, or sink in clouds of gold;
Transparent forms, too fine for mortal sight,
Their fluid bodies half dissolved in light.
Loose to the wind their airy garment flew,
Thin glitt'ring textures of the filmy dew,
Dipped in the richest tincture of the skies,
Where light disports in ever-mingling dyes;
While ev'ry beam new transient colours flings,
Colours that change whene'er they wave their wings."[2]

Doubtless these are not Shakespeare's sylphs; but side by side with a natural and living rose, we may still look with pleasure on a flower of diamonds, as they come from the hand of the jeweller, a masterpiece of art and patience, whose facets make the light glitter, and cast a shower of sparkles over the filigree foliage in which they are embedded. A score of times in a poem of

[1] Pope's Works, i. 347; *Windsor Forest*, *l.* 111–118.
[2] *Ibid.* ii. 154; *The Rape of the Lock*, c. 2, *l.* 47–68

Pope's we stop to look with wonder on some of these literary adornments. He feels so well in what the strong point of his talent lies, that he abuses it; he delights to show his skill. What can be staler than a card party, or more repellent to poetry than the queen of spades or the king of hearts? Yet, doubtless for a wager, he has recorded in the *Rape of the Lock* a game of ombre; we follow it, hear it, recognise the dresses:

> "Behold four kings in majesty revered,
> With hoary whiskers and a forky beard,
> And four fair queens whose hands sustain a flower,
> Th' expressive emblem of their softer power;
> Four knaves in garb succinct, a trusty band;
> Caps on their heads and halberts in their hand;
> And parti-coloured troops, a shining train,
> Drawn forth to combat on the velvet plain."[1]

We see the trumps, the cuts, the tricks, and instantly afterwards the coffee, the china, the spoons, the fiery spirits (to wit, spirits of wine); we have here in advance the modes and periphrases of Delille. The celebrated verses in which Delille at once employs and describes imitative harmony, are translated from Pope.[2] It is an expiring poetry, but poetry still: an ornament to put on a mantelpiece is an inferior work of art, but still it is a work of art.

To descriptive talent Pope unites oratorical talent. This art, proper to the classical age, is the art of expressing ordinary general ideas. For a hundred and fifty years men of both the thinking countries, England

[1] Pope's Works, ii. 160, *The Rape of the Lock*, c. 3, 160, *l.* 37–44.

[2] "Peins-moi légèrement l'amant léger de Flore,
Qu'un doux ruisseau murmure en vers plus doux encore."

and France, employed herein all their study. They seized those universal and limited truths, which, being situated between lofty philosophical abstractions and petty sensible details, are the subject-matter of eloquence and rhetoric, and form what we now-a-days call commonplaces. They arranged them in compartments; methodically developed them; made them obvious by grouping and symmetry; disposed them in regular processions, which with dignity and majesty advance well disciplined, and in a body. The influence of this oratorical reason became so great, that it was imposed on poetry itself. Buffon ends by saying, in praise of certain verses, that they are as fine as fine prose. In fact, poetry at this time became a more affected prose subjected to rhyme. It was only a higher kind of conversation and more select discourse. It is powerless when it is necessary to paint or represent an action, when the need is to see and make visible living passions, large genuine emotions, men of flesh and blood; it results only in college epics like the *Henriade*, freezing odes and tragedies like those of Voltaire and Jean-Baptiste Rousseau, or those of Addison, Thomson, Dr. Johnson, and the rest. It makes them up of dissertations, because it is capable of nothing else but dissertations. Here henceforth is its domain; and its final task is the didactic poem, which is a dissertation in verse. Pope excelled in it, and his most perfect poems are those made up of precepts and arguments. Artifice in these is less shocking than elsewhere. A poem—I am wrong, essays like his upon *Criticism*, on *Man* and the *Government of Providence*, on the *Knowledye and Characters of Men*, deserve to be written after reflection; they are a study, and almost a scientific monograph. We may, we even ought, to weigh all the

words, and verify all the connections: art and attention are not superfluous, but necessary; the question concerns exact precepts and close arguments. In this Pope is incomparable. I do not think that there is in the world a versified prose like his; that of Boileau is not to be compared to it. Not that its ideas are very worthy of attention; we have worn them out, they interest us no longer. The *Essay on Criticism* resembles Boileau's *Epîtres* and *L'Art Poétique*, excellent works, no longer read but in classes at school. It is a collection of very wise precepts, whose only fault is their being too true. To say that good taste is rare; that we ought to reflect and learn before deciding; that the rules of art are drawn from nature; that pride, ignorance, prejudice, partiality, envy, pervert our judgment; that a critic should be sincere, modest, polished, kindly,—all these truths might then be discoveries, but they are so no longer. I suppose that in the time of Pope, Dryden, and Boileau, men had special need of setting their ideas in order, and of seeing them very distinctly in very clear phrases. Now that this need is satisfied, it has disappeared: we demand ideas, not arrangement of ideas; the pigeon-holes are manufactured, fill them. Pope was obliged to do it once in the *Essay on Man*, which is a sort of *Vicaire Savoyard*,[1] less original than the other. He shows that God made all for the best, that man is limited in his capacity and ought not to judge God, that our passions and imperfections serve for the general good and for the ends of Providence, that happiness lies in virtue and submission to the divine will. We recognise here a sort of deism and optimism, of which there was much

[1] A tale of J. J. Rousseau, in which he tries to depict a philosophical clergyman.—TR.

at that time, borrowed, like those of Rousseau, from the *Théodicée* of Leibnitz,[1] but tempered, toned down, and arranged for the use of respectable people. The conception is not very lofty: this curtailed deity, making his appearance at the beginning of the eighteenth century, is but a residuum: religion having disappeared, he remained at the bottom of the crucible; and the reasoners of the time, having no metaphysical inventiveness, kept him in their system to stop a gap. In this state and at this place this deity resembles classic verse. He has an imposing appearance, is comprehended easily, is stripped of power, is the product of cold argumentative reason, and leaves the people who attend to him, very much at ease; on all these accounts he is akin to an Alexandrine. This poor conception is all the more wretched in Pope because it does not belong to him, for he is only accidentally a philosopher; and to find matter for his poem, three or four systems, deformed and attenuated, are amalgamated in his work. He boasts of having tempered them one with the other, and having "steered between the extremes."[2] The truth is, that he did not understand them, and that he jumbles incongruous ideas at every step. There is a passage in which, to obtain an effect of style, he becomes a pantheist; moreover he is bombastic, and assumes the supercilious, imperious tone of a young doctor of theology. I find no individual invention except in his *Moral Essays;* in them is a theory of dominant passion which is worth reading. After all, he went farther than Boileau, for instance, in the knowledge of man. Psychology is indigenous in England; we meet it there through-

[1] The *Théodicée* was written in French, and published in 1710.—TR.
[2] These words are taken from the *Design of an Essay on Man.*

, even in the least creative minds. It gives rise to novel, dispossesses philosophy, produces the essay, ears in the newspapers, fills current literature, like se indigenous plants which multiply on every soil. But if the ideas are mediocre, the art of expressing m is truly marvellous: marvellous is the word. "I se verse," says Pope in his *Design of an Essay on n*, "because I found I could express them (ideas) e shortly this way than in prose itself." In fact, ry word is effective: every passage must be read vly; every epithet is an epitome; a more condensed le was never written; and, on the other hand, no laboured more skilfully in introducing philosophical nulas into the current conversation of society. His ims have become proverbs. I open his *Essay on n* at random, and fall upon the beginning of his ond book. An orator, an author of the school of fon, would be transported with admiration to see many literary treasures collected in so small a space:

"Know then thyself, presume not God to scan,
The proper study of mankind is man.
Placed on this isthmus of a middle state,
A being darkly wise, and rudely great:
With too much knowledge for the sceptic side,
With too much weakness for the stoic's pride,
He hangs between; in doubt to act, or rest;
In doubt to deem himself a God or beast;
In doubt his mind or body to prefer;
Born but to die, and reas'ning but to err;
Alike in ignorance, his reason such,
Whether he thinks too little or too much;
Chaos of thought and passion, all confused;
Still by himself abused or disabused;

Created half to rise, and half to fall;
Great lord of all things, yet a prey to all;
Sole judge of truth in endless error hurled,
The glory, jest, and riddle of the world."[1]

The first verse epitomises the whole of the preceding Epistle, and the second epitomises the present Epistle; it is, as it were, a kind of staircase leading from one temple to another, regularly composed of symmetrical steps, so aptly disposed that from the first step we see at a glance the whole building we have left, and from the second the whole edifice we are about to visit. Have we ever seen a finer entrance, or one more conformable to the rules which bid us unite our ideas, recall them when developed, pre-announce them when not yet developed? But this is not enough. After this brief announcement, which premises that he is about to treat of human nature, a longer announcement is necessary, to paint beforehand, with the greatest possible splendour, this human nature of which he is about to treat. This is the proper oratorical exordium, like those which Bossuet places at the beginning of his funeral orations; a sort of elaborate portico to receive the audience on their entrance, and prepare them for the magnificence of the temple. The antitheses follow each other in couples like a succession of columns; thirteen couples form a suite; and the last is raised above the rest by a word, which concentrates and combines all. In other hands this prolongation of the same form would become tedious; in Pope's it interests us, so much variety is there in the arrangement and the adornments. In one place the antithesis is comprised in a single line, in another it occupies two; now it is in the substantives,

[1] Pope's Works, ii.; *An Essay on Man*, Ep. ii. 375, *l.* 1–18.

now in the adjectives and verbs; now only in the ideas, now it penetrates the sound and position of the words. In vain we see it reappear; we are not wearied, because each time it adds somewhat to our idea, and shows us the object in a new light. This object itself may be abstract, obscure, unpleasant, opposed to poetry; the style spreads over it its own light; noble images borrowed from the grand and simple spectacles of nature, illustrate and adorn it. For there is a classical architecture of ideas as well as of stones: the first, like the second, is a friend to clearness and regularity, majesty and calm; like the second, it was invented in Greece, transmitted through Rome to France, through France to England, and slightly altered in its passage. Of all the masters who have practised it in England, Pope is the most skilled.

After all is there anything in the lines just quoted but decoration? Translate them literally into prose, and of all those beauties there remains not one. If the reader dissects Pope's arguments, he will hardly be moved by them; he would instinctively think of Pascal's *Pensées*, and remark upon the astonishing difference between a versifier and a man. A good epitome, a good bit of style, well worked out, well written, he would say, and nothing further. Clearly the beauty of the verses arose from the difficulty overcome, the well-chosen sounds, the symmetrical rhythms; this was all, and it was not much. A great writer is a man who, having passions, knows his dictionary and grammar; Pope thoroughly knew his dictionary and his grammar, but stopped there.

People will say that this merit is small, and that I do not inspire them with a desire to read Pope's verses. True; at least I do not counsel them to read many.

I would add, however, by way of excuse, that there is a kind in which he succeeds, that his descriptive and oratorical talents find in portraiture matter which suits them, and that in this he frequently approaches La Bruyère; that several of his portraits, those of Addison, Lord Hervey, Lord Wharton, the Duchess of Marlborough, are medals worthy of finding a place in the cabinets of the curious, and of remaining in the archives of the human race; that when he chisels one of these heads, the comprehensive images, the unlooked-for connections of words, the sustained and multiplied contrasts, the perpetual and extraordinary conciseness, the incessant and increasing impulse of all the strokes of eloquence brought to bear upon the same spot, stamp upon the memory an impress which we never forget. It is better to repudiate these partial apologies, and frankly to avow that, on the whole, this great poet, the glory of his age, is wearisome—wearisome to us. "A woman of forty," says Stendhal, "is only beautiful to those who have loved her in their youth." The poor muse in question is not forty years old for us; she is a hundred and forty. Let us remember, when we wish to judge her fairly, the time when we made French verses like our Latin verse. Taste became transformed an age ago, for the human mind has wheeled round; with the prospect the perspective has changed; we must take this change of place into account. Now-a-days we demand new ideas and bare sentiments; we care no longer for the clothing, we want the thing. Exordium, transitions, peculiarities of style, elegances of expression, the whole literary wardrobe, is sent to the old-clothes shop; we only keep what is indispensable; we trouble ourselves no more about adornment

but about truth. The men of the preceding century were quite different. This was seen when Pope translated the *Iliad;* it was the *Iliad* written in the style of the *Henriade:* by virtue of this travesty the public admired it. They would not have admired it in the simple Greek guise; they only consented to see it in powder and ribbons. It was the costume of the time, and it was very necessary to put it on. Dr. Johnson in his commercial and academical style affirms even that the demand for elegance had increased so much, that pure nature could no longer be borne.

Good society and men of letters made a little world by themselves, which had been formed and refined after the manner and ideas of France. They adopted a correct and noble style at the same time as fashion and fine manners. They held by this style as by their coat; it was a matter of propriety or ceremony; there was an accepted and unalterable pattern; they could not change it without indecency or ridicule; to write, not according to the rules, especially in verse, effusively and naturally, would have been like showing oneself in the drawing-room in slippers and a dressing-gown. Their pleasure in reading verse was to try whether the pattern had been exactly followed, originality was only permitted in details; a man might adjust here a lace, there some embroidered stripe, but he was bound scrupulously to preserve the conventional form, to brush everything minutely, and never to appear without new gold lace and glossy broadcloth. The attention was only bestowed on refinements; a more elaborate braid, a more brilliant velvet, a feather more gracefully arranged; to this were boldness and experiment reduced; the smallest incorrectness, the

slightest incongruity, would have offended their eyes; they perfected the infinitely little. Men of letters acted like these coquettes, for whom the superb goddesses of Michael Angelo and Rubens are but milk-maids, but who utter a cry of pleasure at the sight of a ribbon at twenty francs a yard. A division, a displacing of verses, a metaphor delighted them, and this was all which could still charm them. They went on day by day embroidering, bedizening, narrowing the bright classic robe, until at last the human mind, feeling fettered, tore it, cast it away, and began to move. Now that this robe is on the ground the critics pick it up, hang it up in their museum of ancient curiosities, so that everybody can see it, shake it, and try to conjecture from it the feelings of the fine lords and of the fine speakers who wore it.

V.

It is not everything to have a beautiful dress, strongly sewn and fashionable; a man must be able to get into it easily. Reviewing the whole train of the English poets of the eighteenth century, we perceive that they do not easily get into the classical dress. This gold-embroidered jacket, which fits a Frenchman so well, hardly suits their figure; from time to time a too powerful, awkward movement makes rents in the sleeves and elsewhere. For instance, Matthew Prior seems at first sight to have all the qualities necessary to wear the jacket well; he has been an ambassador to the French court, and writes pretty French *impromptus;* he turns off with facility little jesting poems on a dinner, a lady; he is gallant, a man of society, a pleasant story-teller, epicurean, even sceptical like the

courtiers of Charles II., that is to say, as far as and including political roguery; in short, he is an accomplished man of the world, as times went, with a correct and flowing style, having at command a light and a noble verse, and pulling, according to the rules of Bossu and Boileau, the string of mythological puppets. With all this, we find him neither gay enough nor refined enough. Bolingbroke called him wooden-faced, stubborn, and said there was something Dutch in him. His manners smacked very strongly of those of Rochester, and the well-clad scamps whom the Restoration bequeathed to the Revolution. He took the first woman at hand, shut himself up with her for several days, drank hard, fell asleep, and let her make off with his money and clothes. Amongst other drabs, ugly enough and always dirty, he finished by keeping Elizabeth Cox, and all but married her; fortunately he died just in time. His style was like his manners. When he tried to imitate La Fontaine's *Hans Carvel*, he made it dull, and lengthened it; he could not be piquant, but he was biting; his obscenities have a cynical harshness; his raillery is a satire, and in one of his poems *To a Young Gentleman in Love*, the lash becomes a knock-down blow. On the other hand, he was not a common roysterer. Of his two principal poems, one on *Solomon* paraphrases and treats of the remark of Ecclesiastes, "All is vanity." From this picture we see forthwith that we are in a biblical land: such an idea would not then have occurred to a boon companion of the Duke of Orleans, Regent of France. Solomon relates how he in vain "proposed his doubts to the lettered Rabbins," how he has been equally unfortunate in the hopes and desires of love, the possession of power, and ends by

trusting to an "omniscient Master, omnipresent King." Here we have English gloom and English conclusions.[1] Moreover, under the rhetorical and uniform composition of his verses, we perceive warmth and passion, rich painting, a sort of magnificence, and the profusion of an overcharged imagination. The sap in England is always stronger than in France; the sensations there are deeper, and the thoughts more original. Prior's other poem, very bold and philosophical, against conventional truths and pedantries, is a droll discourse on the seat of the soul, from which Voltaire has taken many ideas and much foulness. The whole armoury of the sceptic and materialist was built and furnished in England, when the French took to it. Voltaire has only selected and sharpened the arrows. This poem is also wholly written in a prosaic style, with a harsh common sense and a medical frankness, not to be terrified by the foulest abominations.[2] *Candide* and the *Earl of Chesterfield's Ears*, by Voltaire, are more brilliant but not more genuine productions. On the whole, with his coarseness, want of taste, prolixity, perspicacity, passion, there is something in this man not in accordance with classical elegance. He goes beyond it or does not attain it.

[1] Prior's Works, ed. Gilfillan, 1851:

> "In the remotest wood and lonely grot,
> Certain to meet that worst of evils, *thought*."

[2] *Alma*, canto ii. *l.* 937-978:

> "Your nicer Hottentots think meet
> With guts and tripe to deck their feet;
> With downcast looks on Totta's legs
> The ogling youth most humbly begs,
> She would not from his hopes remove
> At once his breakfast and his love. . . .
> Before you see, you smell your toast,
> And sweetest she who stinks the most."

This dissonance increases, and attentive eyes soon discover under the regular cloak a kind of energetic and precise imagination, ready to break through it. In this age lived Gay, a sort of La Fontaine, as near La Fontaine as an Englishman can be, that is, not very near, but at least a kind and amiable good fellow, very sincere, very frank, strangely thoughtless, born to be duped, and a young man to the last. Swift said of him that he ought never to have lived more than twenty-two years. "In wit a man, simplicity a child," wrote Pope. He lived, like La Fontaine, at the expense of the great, travelled as much as he could at their charge, lost his money in South-Sea speculations, tried to get a place at court, wrote fables full of humanity to form the heart of the Duke of Cumberland,[1] and ended as a beloved parasite and the domestic poet of the Duke and Duchess of Queensberry. He had little of the grave in his character, and neither many scruples nor manners. It was his sad lot, he said, "that he could get nothing from the court, whether he wrote for or against it." And he wrote his own epitaph:

> "Life is a jest; and all things show it,
> I thought so once; but now I know it."[2]

This laughing careless poet, to revenge himself on the minister, wrote the *Beggars' Opera*, the fiercest and dirtiest of caricatures.[3] In this Opera they cut the throat of men in place of scratching them; babes handle the knife like the rest. Yet Gay was a laugher, but in a style of his own, or rather in that of his

[1] The same duke who was afterwards nicknamed "the Butcher."

[2] *Poems on Several Occasions*, by Mr. John Gay, 1745, 2 vols. ii. 141.

[3] See vol. iii. ch. iii. p. 81.

country. Seeing "certain young men of insipid delicacy,"[1] Ambrose Philips, for instance, who wrote elegant and tender pastorals, in the manner of Fontenelle, he amused himself by parodying and contradicting them, and in the *Shepherd's Week* introduced real rural manners into the metre and form of the visionary poetry: "Thou wilt not find my shepherdesses idly piping on oaten reeds, but milking the kine, tying up the sheaves, or if the hogs are astray, driving them to their styes. My shepherd . . . sleepeth not under myrtle shades, but under a hedge, nor doth he vigilantly defend his flocks from wolves, because there are none."[2] Fancy a shepherd of Theocritus or Virgil, compelled to put on hobnailed shoes and the dress of a Devonshire cowherd; such an oddity would amuse us by the contrast of his person and his garments. So here *The Magician, The Shepherd's Struggle*, are travestied in a modern guise. Listen to the song of the first shepherd, "Lobbin Clout:"

> "Leek to the Welch, to Dutchmen butter's dear,
> Of Irish swains potatoe is the chear;
> Oat for their feasts, the Scotish shepherds grind,
> Sweet turnips are the food of Blouzelind.
> While she loves turnips, butter I'll despise,
> Nor leeks, nor oatmeal, nor potatoe prize."[3]

The other shepherd answers in the same metre; and the two continue, verse after verse, in the ancient manner, but now amidst turnips, strong beer, fat pigs, bespattered at will by modern country vulgarities and

[1] *Poems on Several Occasions;* The Proeme to *The Shepherd's Week*, i. 64. [2] *Ibid.* i. 66.

[3] Gay's Poems, *The Shepherd's Week;* first pastoral, *The Squabble*, p. 80.

the dirt of a northern climate. Van Ostade and Teniers love these vulgar and clownish idyls; and in Gay, as well as with them, unvarnished and sensual drollery has its sway. The people of the north, who are great eaters, always liked country fairs. The vagaries of toss-pots and gossips, the grotesque outburst of the vulgar and animal mind, put them into good humour. A man must be a genuine man of the world or an artist, a Frenchman or an Italian, to be disgusted with them. They are the product of the country, as well as meat and beer: let us try, in order that we may enjoy them, to forget wine, delicate fruits, to give ourselves blunted senses, to become in imagination compatriots of such men. We have become used to the pictures of these drunken boobies, whom Louis XIV. called "baboons," to these red-faced cooks who clean fish, and to the like scenes. Let us get used to Gay; to his poem *Trivia, or the Art of Walking the Streets of London;* to his advice as to dirty gutters, and shoes "with firm, well-hammer'd soles;" his description of the amours of the goddess Cloacina and a scavenger, whence sprang the little shoeblacks. He is a lover of the real, has a precise imagination, does not see objects wholesale and from a general point of view, but singly, with all their outlines and surroundings, whatever they may be, beautiful or ugly, dirty or clean. The other literary men act likewise, even the chief classical writers, including Pope. There is in Pope a minute description, with high-coloured words, local details, in which comprehensive and characteristic features are stamped with such a liberal and sure hand, that we would take the author for a modern realist, and would find in the work an historical document.[1]

[1] *Epistle to Mrs. Blount*, "on her leaving the town."

As to Swift, he is the bitterest positivist, and more so in poetry than in prose. Let us read his eclogue on *Strephon and Chloe,* if we would know how far men can debase the noble poetic drapery. They make a dishclout of it, or dress clodhoppers in it; the Roman toga and Greek chlamys do not suit these barbarians' shoulders. They are like those knights of the middle-ages, who, when they had taken Constantinople, muffled themselves for a joke, in long Byzantine robes, and went riding through the streets in these disguises, dragging their embroidery in the gutter.

These men will do well, like the knights, to return to their manor, to the country, the mud of their ditches, and the dunghill of their farm-yards. The less man is fitted for social life, the more he is fitted for solitary life. He enjoys the country the more for enjoying the world less. Englishmen have always been more feudal and more fond of the country than Frenchmen. Under Louis XIV. and Louis XV. the worst misfortune for a nobleman was to go to his estate in the country and grow rusty there; away from the smiles of the king and the fine conversation of Versailles, there was nothing left but to yawn and die. In England, in spite of artificial civilisation and the charms of polite society, the love of the chase and of bodily exercise, political interests and the necessities of elections brought the nobles back to their estates. And there their natural instincts returned. A sad and impassioned man, naturally self-dependent, converses with objects; a grand grey sky, whereon the autumn mists slumber, a sudden burst of sunshine lighting up a moist field, depress or excite him; inanimate things seem to him instinct with life; and the faint light, which in the morn-

ing reddens the fringe of heaven, moves him as much as the smile of a young girl at her first ball. Thus is genuine descriptive poetry born. It appears in Dryden, in Pope himself, even in the writers of elegant pastorals, and shines forth in Thomson's *Seasons*. This poet, the son of a clergyman, and very poor, lived, like most of the literary men of the time, on donations and literary subscriptions, on sinecures and political pensions; for lack of money he did not marry; wrote tragedies, because tragedies brought in plenty of money; and ended by settling in a country house, lying in bed till mid-day, indolent, contemplative, but a simple and honest man, affectionate and beloved. He saw and loved the country in its smallest details, not outwardly only, as Saint Lambert,[1] his imitator; he made it his joy, his amusement, his habitual occupation; a gardener at heart, delighted to see the spring arrive, happy to be able to add another field to his garden. He paints all the little things, without being ashamed, for they interest him, and takes pleasure in "the smell of the dairy." We hear him speak of the "insect armies," and "when the envenomed leaf begins to curl,"[2] and of the birds which, foreseeing the approaching rain, "streak their wings with oil, to throw the lucid moisture trickling off."[3] He perceives objects so clearly that he makes them visible: we recognise the English landscape, green and moist, half drowned in floating vapours, blotted here and there by violet clouds, which burst in showers at the horizon, which they darken, but where the light is delicately

[1] A French pastoral writer (1717-1803), who wrote, in imitation of Thomson, *Les Saisons*.—Tr.

[2] Poetical Works of J. Thomson, ed. R. Bell, 1855, 2 vols.; ii. *Spring*, 18. [3] *Ibid.* 19

dimmed by the fog, and the clear heavens show at intervals very bright and pure:

> "Th' effusive South
> Warms the wide air, and o'er the void of heaven
> Breathes the big clouds with vernal showers distent.[1] ...
> Thus all day long the full-distended clouds
> Indulge their genial stores, and well-showered earth
> Is deep enriched with vegetable life;
> Till in the western sky, the downward sun
> Looks out, effulgent, from amid the flush
> Of broken clouds, gay-shifting to his beam.
> The rapid radiance instantaneous strikes
> The illumined mountain; through the forest streams;
> Shakes on the floods; and in a yellow mist,
> Far smoking o'er the interminable plain,
> In twinkling myriads lights the dewy gems.
> Moist, bright, and green, the landscape laughs around."[2]

This is emphatic, but it is also opulent. In this air and this vegetation, in this imagination and this style, there is a heaping up, and, as it were, an impasto of effaced or sparkling tints; they are here the glistening and lustrous robe of nature and art. We must see them in Rubens—he is the painter and poet of the teeming and humid clime; but we discover it also in others; and in this magnificence of Thomson, in this exaggerated, luxuriant, grand colouring, we find occasionally the rich palette of Rubens.

VI.

All this suits ill the classical embroidery. Thomson's visible imitations of Virgil, his episodes inserted to fill

[1] Poetical Works of Thomson, *Spring*, ii. 19. [2] *Ibid.* 20.

up space, his invocations to spring, to the muse, to philosophy, all these pedantic relics and conventionalisms, produce incongruity. But the contrast is much more marked in another way. The worldly artificial life such as Louis XIV. had made fashionable, began to weary Europe. It was found meagre and hollow; people grew tired of always acting, submitting to etiquette. They felt that gallantry is not love, nor madrigals poetry, nor amusement happiness. They perceived that man is not an elegant doll, or a dandy the masterpiece of nature, and that there is a world beyond the drawing-room. A Genevese plebeian (J. J. Rousseau), a Protestant and a recluse, whom religion, education, poverty, and genius had led more quickly and further than others, spoke out the public secret aloud; and it was thought that he had discovered or rediscovered the country, conscience, religion, the rights of man, and natural sentiments. Then appeared a new personality, the idol and model of his time, the man of feeling, who, by his grave character and liking for nature, contrasted with the man at court. Doubtless the man of feeling has not escaped the influence of the places he has frequented. He is refined and insipid, melting at the sight of the young lambs nibbling the newly grown grass, blessing the little birds, who give a concert to celebrate their happiness. He is emphatic and wordy, writes tirades about sentiment, inveighs against the age, apostrophises virtue, reason, truth, and the abstract divinities, which are engraved in delicate outline on frontispieces. In spite of himself, he continues a man of the drawing-room and the academy; after uttering sweet things to the ladies, he utters them to nature, and declaims in polished periods about the

Deity. But after all, it is through him that the revolt against classical customs begins; and in this respect, he is more advanced in Germanic England than in Latin France. Thirty years before Rousseau, Thomson had expressed all Rousseau's sentiments, almost in the same style. Like him, he painted the country with sympathy and enthusiasm. Like him, he contrasted the golden age of primitive simplicity with modern miseries and corruption. Like him, he exalted deep love, conjugal tenderness, the union of souls and perfect esteem animated by desire, paternal affection, and all domestic joys. Like him, he combated contemporary frivolity, and compared the ancient republics with modern States:

> "Proofs of a people, whose heroic aims
> Soared far above the little selfish sphere
> Of doubting modern life."[1]

Like Rousseau, he praised gravity, patriotism, liberty, virtue; rose from the spectacle of nature to the contemplation of God, and showed to man glimpses of immortal life beyond the tomb. Like him, in short, he marred the sincerity of his emotion and the truth of his poetry by sentimental vapidities, by pastoral billing and cooing, and by such an abundance of epithets, personified abstractions, pompous invocations and oratorical tirades, that we perceive in him beforehand the false and ornamental style of Thomas,[2] David,[3] and the first French Revolution.

[1] Poetical Works of Thomson, *Liberty*, part i. 102.

[2] Anthony Léonard Thomas (1732-1785) wrote memoirs and essays on the character of celebrated men in highly oratorical and pompous style.—TR.

[3] See the paintings of David, called *Les Fêtes de la Révolution*.

Other authors follow in the same track. The literature of that period might be called the library of the man of feeling. First there was Richardson, the puritanic printer, with his Sir Charles Grandison,[1] a man of principles, an accomplished model of a gentleman, a professor of decorum and morality, with a soul into the bargain. There is Sterne too, a refined and sickly blackguard, who, amidst his buffooneries and oddities, pauses to weep over an ass or an imaginary prisoner.[2] There is, in particular, Henry Mackenzie, "the Man of Feeling," whose timid, delicate hero weeps five or six times a day; who grows consumptive through sensibility, dares not broach his love till at the point of death, and dies in broaching it. Naturally, praise induces satire; and in the opposite camp we see Fielding, a valiant roysterer, and Sheridan, a brilliant but naughty fellow, the one with Blifil, the other with Joseph Surface, two hypocrites, especially the second, not coarse, red-faced, and smelling of the vestry, like Tartuffe, but worldly, well-clad, a fine talker, loftily serious, sad and gentle from excess of tenderness, who, with his hand on his heart and a tear in his eye, showers on the public his sentences and periods whilst he soils his brother's reputation and debauches his neighbour's wife. When a man of feeling has been thus created, he soon has an epic made for him. A Scotsman, a man of wit, of too much wit, having published on his own account an unsuccessful rhapsody, wished to recover his expenses, visited the mountains of his country, gathered picturesque images, collected fragments of legends, plastered over the whole an abundance of eloquence and rhetoric, and created a Celtic Homer, Ossian, who with Oscar, Malvina,

[1] See vol. iii. p. 285. [2] See vol. iii. p. 308.

and his whole troop, made the tour of Europe, and, about 1830, ended by furnishing baptismal names for French *grisettes* and *perruquiers*. Macpherson displayed to the world an imitation of primitive manners, not ever-true, for the extreme rudeness of barbarians would have shocked the people, but yet well enough preserved or portrayed to contrast with modern civilisation, and persuade the public that they were looking upon pure nature. A keen sympathy with Scottish landscape, so grand, so cold, so gloomy, rain on the hills, the birch trembling to the wind, the mist of heaven and the vague musing of the soul, so that every dreamer found there the emotions of his solitary walks and his philosophic sadness; chivalric exploits and magnanimity, heroes who set out alone to engage an army, faithful virgins dying on the tomb of their betrothed; an impassioned, coloured style, affecting to be abrupt, yet polished; able to charm a disciple of Rousseau by its warmth and elegance: here was something to transport the young enthusiasts of the time; civilised barbarians, scholarly lovers of nature, dreaming of the delights of savage life, whilst they shook off the powder which the hairdresser had left on their coats.

Yet this is not the course of the main current of poetry; it runs in the direction of sentimental reflection: the greatest number of poems, and those most sought after, are emotional dissertations. In fact, a man of feeling breaks out in excessive declamations. When he sees a cloud, he dreams of human nature and constructs a phrase. Hence at this time among poets, swarm the melting philosophers and the tearful academicians; Gray, the morose hermit of Cambridge, and Akenside, a noble thinker, both learned imitators of lofty Greek

poetry; Beattie, a metaphysical moralist, with a young girl's nerves and an old maid's hobbies; the amiable and affectionate Goldsmith who wrote the *Vicar of Wakefield*, the most charming of Protestant pastorals; poor Collins, a young enthusiast, who was disgusted with life, would read nothing but the Bible, went mad, was shut up in an asylum, and in his intervals of liberty wandered in Chichester cathedral, accompanying the music with sobs and groans; Glover, Watts, Shenstone, Smart, and others. The titles of their works sufficiently indicate their character. One writes a poem on *The Pleasures of Imagination*, another odes on the *Passions* and on *Liberty*; one an *Elegy written in a Country Churchyard* and a *Hymn to Adversity*, another a poem on a *Deserted Village*, and on the character of surrounding civilisations (Goldsmith's *Traveller*); one a sort of epic on *Thermopylæ*, and another the moral history of a young *Minstrel*. They were nearly all grave, spiritual men, impassioned for noble ideas, with Christian aspirations or convictions, given to meditating on man, inclined to melancholy, to description, invocation, lovers of abstraction and allegory, who, to attain greatness, willingly mounted on stilts. One of the least strict and most noted of them was Young, the author of *Night Thoughts*, a clergyman and a courtier, who, having vainly attempted to enter Parliament, then to become a bishop, married, lost his wife and children, and made use of his misfortunes to write meditations on *Life, Death, Immortality, Time, Friendship, The Christian Triumph, Virtue's Apology, A Moral Survey of the Nocturnal Heavens*, and many other similar pieces. Doubtless there are brilliant flashes of imagination in his poems; seriousness and elevation are not wanting; we can even see that

he aims at them; but we discover much more quickly that he makes the most of his grief, and strikes attitudes. He exaggerates and declaims, studies effect and style, confuses Greek and Christian ideas. Fancy an unhappy father, who says:

"*Silence* and *Darkness!* Solemn sisters! Twins
From ancient *Night*! I to *Day's* soft-ey'd sister pay my court, ...[1]
(Endymion's rival!) and her aid implore;
Now first implor'd in succour to the *Muse*."[2]

And a few pages further on he invokes heaven and earth, when mentioning the resurrection of the Saviour. And yet the sentiment is fresh and sincere. Is it not one of the greatest of modern ideas to put Christian philosophy into verse? Young and his contemporaries say beforehand that which Chateaubriand and Lamartine were to discover. The true, the futile, all is here forty years earlier than in France. The angels and the other celestial machinery long figured in England before appearing in Chateaubriand's *Génie du Christianisme* and the *Martyrs*. Atala and Chactas are of the same family as Malvina and Fingal. If Lamartine read Gray's odes and Akenside's reflections, he would find there the melancholy sweetness, the exquisite art, the fine arguments, and half the ideas of his own poetry. And nevertheless, near as they were to a literary renovation, Englishmen did not yet attain it. In vain the foundation was changed, the form remained. They did not shake off the classical drapery; they write too well, they dare not be natural. They have always a patent stock of fine

[1] Young's *Night Thoughts*. Night the First: On Life, Death, and Immortality. [2] *Ibid.* Night the Third: Narcissa.

suitable words, poetical elegances, where each of them thought himself bound to go and pick out his phrases. It boots them nothing to be impassioned or realistic; like Shenstone, to dare to describe a *Schoolmistress*, and the very part on which she whips a young rascal; their simplicity is conscious, their frankness archaic, their emotion formal, their tears academical. Ever, at the moment of writing, an august model starts up, a sort of schoolmaster, weighing on each with his full weight, with all the weight which a hundred and twenty years of literature can give his precepts. Their prose is always the slave of the period: Dr. Johnson, who was at once the La Harpe and the Boileau of his age, explains and imposes on all the studied, balanced, irreproachable phrase; and classical ascendency is still so strong that it domineers over nascent history, the only kind of English literature which was then European and original. Hume, Robertson, and Gibbon were almost French in their taste, language, education, conception of man. They relate like men of the world, cultivated and well-informed, with charm and clearness, in a polished, rhythmic, sustained style. They show a liberal spirit, an unvaried moderation, an impartial reason. They banish from history all coarseness and tediousness. They write without fanaticism or prejudice. But, at the same time, they attenuate human nature; comprehend neither barbarism nor loftiness; paint revolutions and passions, as people might do who had seen nothing but decked drawing-rooms and dusted libraries; they judge enthusiasts with the coldness of chaplains or the smile of a sceptic; they blot out the salient features which distinguish human physiognomies; they cover all the harsh points of truth

with a brilliant and uniform varnish. At last there started up an unfortunate Scotch peasant (Burns), rebelling against the world, and in love, with the yearnings, lusts, greatness, and irrationality of modern genius. Now and then, behind his plough, he lighted on genuine verses, verses such as Heine and Alfred de Musset have written in our own days. In those few words, combined after a new fashion, there was a revolution. Two hundred new verses sufficed. The human mind turned on its hinges, and so did civil society. When Roland, being made a minister, presented himself before Louis XVI. in a simple dress-coat and shoes without buckles, the master of the ceremonies raised his hands to heaven, thinking that all was lost. In reality, all was changed.

BOOK IV.

MODERN LIFE.

CHAPTER I.

Ideas and Productions.

I.

On the eve of the nineteenth century the great modern revolution began in Europe. The thinking public and the human mind changed, and whilst these changes took place a new literature sprang up.

The preceding age had done its work. Perfect prose and classical style put within reach of the most backward and the dullest minds the notions of literature and the discoveries of science. Moderate monarchies and regular administrations had permitted the middle class to develop itself under the pompous aristocracy of the court, as useful plants may be seen shooting up beneath trees which serve for show and ornament. They multiply, grow, rise to the height of their rivals, envelop them in their luxuriant growth, and obscure them by their dense clusters. A new world, a world of citizens and plebeians, henceforth occupies the ground, attracts the gaze, imposes its form on manners, stamps its image on minds. Towards the close of the century a sudden

concourse of extraordinary events brings it all at once to the light, and sets it on an eminence unknown to any previous age. With the grand applications of science, democracy appears. The steam-engine and spinning-jenny create in England towns of from three hundred and fifty thousand to five hundred thousand souls. The population is doubled in fifty years, and agriculture becomes so perfect, that, in spite of this enormous increase of mouths to be fed, one-sixth of the inhabitants provide from the same soil food for the rest; imports increase threefold, and even more; the tonnage of vessels increases sixfold, the exports sixfold and more.[1] Comfort, leisure, instruction, reading, travel, whatever had been the privilege of a few, became the common property of the many. The rising tide of wealth raised the best of the poor to comfort, and the best of the well-to-do to opulence. The rising tide of civilisation raised the mass of the people to the rudiments of education, and the mass of citizens to complete education. In 1709 appeared the first daily newspaper,[2] as big as a man's hand, which the editor did not know how to fill, and which, added to all the other papers, did not circulate to the extent of three thousand numbers in the year. In 1844 the Stamp Office showed that 71 million newspapers had been printed during the past year, many as large as volumes, and containing as much matter. Artisans and townsfolk, enfranchised, enriched, having gained a competence left the low depths where they had been buried in their narrow parsimony, ignorance, and routine; they made their

[1] See Alison, *History of Europe*; Porter, *Progress of the Nation*.

[2] In the *Fourth Estate*, by F. Knight Hunt, 2 vols. 1840, it is said (i. 175) that the first daily and morning paper, *The Daily Courant*, appeared in 1709.—Tr.

appearance on the stage now, doffed their workman's and supernumerary's dress, assumed the leading parts by a sudden irruption or a continuous progress, by dint of revolutions, with a prodigality of labour and genius, amidst vast wars, successively or simultaneously in America, France, the whole of Europe, founding or destroying states, inventing or restoring sciences, conquering or acquiring political rights. They grew noble through their great deeds, became the rivals, equals, conquerors of their masters; they need no longer imitate them, being heroes in their turn: like them, they can point to their crusades; like them, they have gained the right of having a poetry; and like them, they will have a poetry.

In France, the land of precocious equality and completed revolutions, we must observe this new character —the plebeian bent on getting on; Augereau, son of a greengrocer; Marceau, son of a lawyer; Murat, son of an innkeeper; Ney, son of a cooper; Hoche, formerly a sergeant, who in his tent, by night, read Condillac's *Traité des Sensations;* and chief of all, that spare young man, with lank hair, hollow cheeks, eaten up with ambition, his heart full of romantic fancies and grand rough-hewn ideas, who, a lieutenant for seven years, read twice through the whole stock of a bookseller at Valence, who about this time (1792) in Italy, though suffering from itch, had just destroyed five armies with a troop of barefooted heroes, and gave his government an account of his victories with all his faults of spelling and of French. He became master, proclaimed himself the representative of the Revolution, declared, "that a career is open to talent," and impelled others along with him in his enterprises. They follow him, because there

is glory, and above all, advancement, to be won. "Two officers," says Stendhal, "commanded a battery at Talavera; a ball laid low the captain. 'So!' said the lieutenant, 'François is dead, I shall be captain.' 'Not yet,' said François, who was only stunned, and got on his feet again." These two men were neither enemies nor wicked; on the contrary, they were companions and comrades; but the lieutenant wanted to rise a step. Such was the sentiment which provided men for the exploits and carnage of the Empire, which caused the Revolution of 1830, and which now, in this vast stifling democracy, compels men to vie with each other in intrigues and labour, genius and baseness, to get out of their primitive condition, and raise themselves to the summit, of which the possession is given up to their rivalry or promised to their toil. The dominant character now-a-days is no longer the man of the drawing-room, whose position in society is settled and whose fortune is made; elegant and careless, with no employment but to amuse himself and to please; who loves to converse, who is gallant, who passes his life in conversation with finely dressed ladies, amidst the duties of society and the pleasures of the world: it is the man in a black coat, who works alone in his room or rushes about in a cab to make friends and protectors; often envious, feeling himself always above or below his station in life, sometimes resigned, never satisfied, but fertile in invention, not sparing his labour, finding the picture of his blemishes and his strength in the drama of Victor Hugo and the novels of Balzac.[1]

This man has also other and greater cares. With

[1] To realise the contrast, compare *Gil Blas* and *Ruy Blas*, Marivaux's *Paysan Parvenu* and Stendhal's Julien Sorel (in *Rouge et Noir*).

the state of human society, the form of the human mind has changed. It changed by a natural and irresistible development, like a flower growing into fruit, like fruit turning to seed. The mind renews the evolution which it had already performed in Alexandria, not as then in a deleterious atmosphere, amidst the universal degradation of enslaved men, in the increasing decadence of a disorganised society, amidst the anguish of despair and the mists of a dream; but lapt in a purifying atmosphere, amidst the visible progress of an improving society and the general ennobling of lofty and free men, amidst the proudest hopes, in the wholesome clearness of experimental sciences. The oratorical age which declined, as it declined in Athens and Rome, grouped all ideas in beautiful commodious compartments, whose subdivisions instantaneously led the gaze towards the object which they define, so that thenceforth the intellect could enter upon the loftiest conceptions, and seize the aggregate which it had not yet embraced. Isolated nations, French, English, Italians, Germans, drew near and became known to each other through the upheaving of the first French Revolution and the wars of the Empire, as formerly races divided from one another, Greeks, Syrians, Egyptians, Gauls, by the conquests of Alexander and the domination of Rome: so that henceforth each civilisation, expanded by the collision with neighbouring civilisations, can pass beyond its national limits, and multiply its ideas by the commixture of the ideas of others. History and criticism spring up as under the Ptolemies; and from all sides, throughout the universe, in all directions, they were engaged in resuscitating and explaining literatures, religions, manners, societies,

philosophies: so that thenceforth the intellect, enfranchised by the spectacle of past civilisations, can escape from the prejudices of its century, as it has escaped from the prejudices of its country. A new race, hitherto torpid, gave the signal: Germany communicated to the whole of Europe the impetus to a revolution of ideas, as France to a revolution of manners. These simple folk who smoked and warmed themselves by a stove, and seemed only fit to produce learned editions, became suddenly the promoters and leaders of human thought. No race has such a comprehensive mind; none is so well adapted for lofty speculation. We see it in their language, so abstract, that away from the Rhine it seems an unintelligible jargon. And yet thanks to this language, they attained to superior ideas. For the specialty of this revolution, as of the Alexandrian revolution, was that the human mind became more capable of abstraction. They made, on a large scale, the same step as the mathematicians when they pass from arithmetic to algebra, and from ordinary calculation to the computation of the infinite. They perceived, that beyond the limited truths of the oratorical age, there were deeper unfoldings; they passed beyond Descartes and Locke, as the Alexandrians went beyond Plato and Aristotle: they understood that a great operative architect, or round and square atoms, were not causes; that fluids, molecules, and monads were not forces; that a spiritual soul or a physiological secretion would not account for thought. They sought religious sentiment beyond dogmas, poetic beauty beyond rules, critical truths beyond myths. They desired to grasp natural and moral powers as they are, and independ-

ently of the fictitious supports to which their predecessors had attached them. All these supports, souls and atoms, all these fictions, fluids, and monads, all these conventions, rules of the beautiful and of religious symbols, all rigid classifications of things natural, human and divine, faded away and vanished. Thenceforth they were nothing but figures; they were only kept as an aid to the memory, and as auxiliaries of the mind; they served only provisionally, and as starting-points. Through a common movement along the whole line of human thought, causes draw back into an abstract region, where philosophy had not been to search them out for eighteen centuries. Then appeared the disease of the age, the restlessness of Werther and Faust, very like that which in a similar moment agitated men eighteen centuries ago; I mean, discontent with the present, the vague desire of a higher beauty and an ideal happiness, the painful aspiration for the infinite. Man suffered through doubt, yet he doubted; he tried to seize again his beliefs, they melted in his hand; he would settle and rest in the doctrines and the satisfactions which sufficed for his predecessors, and he does not find them sufficient. He launches, like Faust, into anxious researches through science and history, and judges them vain, dubious, good for men like Wagner,[1] learned pedants and bibliomaniacs. It is the "beyond" he sighs for; he forebodes it through the formulas of science, the texts and confessions of the churches, through the amusements of the world, the intoxication of love. A sublime truth exists behind coarse experience and transmitted catechisms; a grand happiness exists beyond the pleasures of society and family

[1] The disciple of Faust.

joys. Whether men are sceptical, resigned, or mystics they have all caught a glimpse of or imagined it, from Goethe to Beethoven, from Schiller to Heine; they have risen towards it in order to stir up the whole swarm of their grand dreams; they will not be consoled for falling away from it; they have mused upon it, even during their deepest fall; they have instinctively dwelt, like their predecessors the Alexandrians and Christians, in that splendid invisible world in which, in ideal peace, slumber the creative essences and powers; and the vehement aspiration of their heart has drawn from their sphere the elementary spirits, "film of flame, who flit and wave in eddying motion! birth and the grave, an infinite ocean, a web ever growing, a life ever glowing, ply at Time's whizzing loom, and weave the vesture of God."[1]

Thus rises the modern man, impelled by two sentiments, one democratic, the other philosophic. From the shallows of his poverty and ignorance he exerts himself to rise, lifting the weight of established society and admitted dogmas, disposed either to reform or to destroy them, and at once generous and rebellious. These two currents from France and Germany at this moment swept into England. The dykes there were so strong, they could hardly force their way, entering more slowly than elsewhere, but entering nevertheless. They made for themselves a new channel between the ancient barriers, and widened without bursting them, by a peaceful and slow transformation which continues till this day.

[1] Goethe's *Faust*, sc. 1.

II.

The new spirit broke out first in a Scottish peasant, Robert Burns: in fact, the man and the circumstances were suitable; scarcely ever was seen together more of misery and talent. He was born January 1759, amid the hoar frost of a Scottish winter, in a cottage of clay built by his father, a poor farmer of Ayrshire; a sad condition, a sad country, a sad lot. A part of the gable fell in a few days after his birth, and his mother was obliged to seek refuge with her child, in the middle of a storm, in a neighbour's house. It is hard to be born in Scotland; it is so cold there, that in Glasgow on a fine day in July, whilst the sun was shining, I did not feel my overcoat too warm. The soil is wretched; there are many bare hills, where the harvest often fails. Burns' father, no longer young, having little more than his arms to depend upon, having taken his farm at too high a rent, burdened with seven children, lived parsimoniously, or rather fasting, in solitude, to avoid temptations to expense. "For several years butchers' meat was a thing unknown in the house." Robert went barefoot and bareheaded; at "the age of thirteen he assisted in thrashing the crop of corn, and at fifteen he was the principal labourer on the farm." The family did all the labour; they kept no servant, male or female. They had not much to eat, but they worked hard. "This kind of life —the cheerless gloom of a hermit, with the unceasing toil of a galley slave—brought me to my sixteenth year," Burns says. His shoulders were bent, melancholy seized him; "almost every evening he was constantly afflicted with a dull headache, which at a future period of his life was exchanged for a palpitation,

of the heart, and a threatening of fainting and suffocation in his bed in the night-time." "The anguish of mind which we felt," says his brother, "was very great." The father grew old; his gray head, careworn brow, temples "wearing thin and bare," his tall bent figure, bore witness to the grief and toil which had spent him. The factor wrote him insolent and threatening letters which "set all the family in tears." There was a respite when the father changed his farm, but a lawsuit sprang up between him and the proprietor: "After three years' tossing and whirling in the vortex of litigation, my father was just saved from the horrors of a gaol by consumption, which after two years' promises kindly stepped in." In order to snatch something from the claws of the lawyers, the two sons were obliged to step in as creditors for arrears of wages. With this little sum they took another farm. Robert had seven pounds a year for his labour; for several years his whole expenses did not exceed this wretched pittance; he had resolved to succeed by dint of abstinence and toil: "I read farming books, I calculated crops, I attended markets; . . . but the first year, from unfortunately buying bad seed, the second from a late harvest, we lost half our crops." Troubles came apace; poverty always engenders them. The master-mason Armour, whose daughter was Burns' sweetheart, was said to contemplate prosecuting him, to obtain a guarantee for the support of his expected progeny, though he refused to accept him as a son-in-law. Jean Armour abandoned him; he could not give his name to her child. He was obliged to hide; he had been publicly admonished by the church. He said: "Even in the hour of social mirth, my gaiety is the madness

of an intoxicated criminal under the hands of the executioner." He resolved to leave the country; he agreed with Dr. Charles Douglas for thirty pounds a year to be bookkeeper or overseer on his estate in Jamaica; for want of money to pay the passage, he was about to "indent himself," that is, become bound as apprentice, when the success of a volume of poetry he had published put a score of guineas into his hands, and for a time brought him brighter days. Such was his life up to the age of twenty-seven, and that which succeeded was little better.

Let us fancy in this condition a man of genius, a true poet, capable of the most delicate emotions and the loftiest aspirations, wishing to rise, to rise to the summit, of which he deemed himself capable and worthy.[1]

Ambition had early made itself heard in him: "I had felt early some stirrings of ambition, but they were the blind groping of Homer's Cyclops round the walls of his cave. . . . The only two openings by which I could enter the temple of fortune were the gate of niggardly economy, or the path of little chicaning bargain-making. The first is so contracted an aperture, I never could squeeze myself into it; the last I always hated—there was contamination in the very entrance."[2] Low occupations depress the soul even more than the body; man perishes in them—is obliged to perish; of necessity there remains of him nothing but a machine: for in the kind of action in which all is monotonous, in which throughout the very long day the arms lift the same flail and drive the same plough, if thought

[1] Most of these details are taken from the *Life and Works of Burns*, by R. Chambers, 1851, 4 vols.

[2] Chambers' *Life of Burns*, i. 14.

does not take this uniform movement, the work is ill done. The poet must take care not to be turned aside by his poetry; to do as Burns did, "think only of his work whilst he was at it." He must think of it always, in the evening unyoking his cattle, on Sunday putting on his new coat, counting on his fingers the eggs and poultry, thinking of the kinds of dung, finding a means of using only one pair of shoes, and of selling his hay at a penny a truss more. He will not succeed if he has not the patient dulness of a labourer, and the crafty vigilance of a petty shopkeeper. How could poor Burns succeed? He was out of place from his birth, and tried his utmost to raise himself above his condition.[1] At the farm at Lochlea, during meal-times, the only moments of relaxation, parents, brothers, and sisters, ate with a spoon in one hand and a book in the other. Burns, at the school of Hugh Rodger, a teacher of mensuration, and later at a club of young men at Tarbolton, strove to exercise himself in general questions, and debated *pro* and *con* in order to see both sides of every idea. He carried a book in his pocket to study in spare moments in the fields; he wore out thus two copies of Mackenzie's *Man of Feeling*. "The collection of songs was my *vade mecum*. I pored over them driving my cart, or walking to labour, song by song, verse by verse, carefully noting the true, tender, sublime, or fustian." He maintained a correspondence with several of his companions in the same rank of life in order to form his style, kept a commonplace book, entered in it ideas on man, religion, the greatest subjects, criticising his first productions. Burns says, "Never did a heart pant more ardently than mine

[1] My great constituent elements are pride and passion.

to be distinguished." He thus divined what he did not learn, rose of himself to the level of the most highly cultivated; in a while, at Edinburgh, he was to read through and through respected doctors, Blair himself; he was to see that Blair had attainments, but no depth. At this time he studied minutely and lovingly the old Scotch ballads; and by night in his cold little room, by day whilst whistling at the plough, he invented forms and ideas. We must think of this in order to measure his efforts, to understand his miseries and his revolt. We must think that the man in whom these great ideas are stirring, threshed the corn, cleaned his cows, went out to dig peats, waded in the muddy snow, and dreaded to come home and find the bailiffs prepared to carry him off to prison. We must think also, that with the ideas of a thinker he had the delicacies and reveries of a poet. Once, having cast his eyes on an engraving representing a dead soldier, and his wife beside him, his child and dog lying in the snow, suddenly, involuntarily, he burst into tears. He writes:

"There is scarcely any earthly object gives me more—I do not know if I should call it pleasure—but something which exalts me, something which enraptures me—than to walk in the sheltered side of a wood, or high plantation, in a cloudy winter day, and hear the stormy wind howling among the trees and raving over the plain.[1] . . . I listened to the birds and frequently turned out of my path, lest I should disturb their little songs or frighten them to another station.

The slavery of mechanical toil and perpetual economy crushed this swarm of grand or graceful dreams as soon as they began to soar. Burns was moreover

[1] Extract from Burns' commonplace-book; Chambers' *Life*, i. 79.

proud, so proud, that afterwards in the world, amongst the great, "an honest contempt for whatever bore the appearance of meanness and servility" made him "fall into the opposite error of hardness of manner." He had also the consciousness of his own merits. "*Pauvre inconnu* as I then was, I had pretty nearly as high an opinion of myself and of my works as I have at this moment, when the public has decided in their favour."[1] Who can wonder that we find at every step in his poems the bitter protests of an oppressed and rebellious plebeian?

We find such recriminations against all society, against State and Church. Burns has a harsh tone, often the very phrases of Rousseau, and wished to be a "vigorous savage," quit civilised life, the dependence and humiliations which it imposes on the wretched.

"It is mortifying to see a fellow, whose abilities would scarcely have made an eight-penny taylor, and whose heart is not worth three farthings, meet with attention and notice that are withheld from the son of genius and poverty."[2] It is hard to

"See yonder poor, o'erlabour'd wight,
So abject, mean, and vile,
Who begs a brother of the earth
To give him leave to toil;
And see his lordly fellow-worm
The poor petition spurn,
Unmindful, though a weeping wife
And helpless offspring mourn."[3]

[1] Chambers' *Life*, i. 231. Burns had a right to think so: when he arrived at night in an inn, the very servants woke their fellow-labourers to come and hear him talk.

[2] Chambers' *Life and Works of Robert Burns*, ii. 68.

[3] *Man was made to Mourn*, a dirge.

Burns says also:

"While winds frae off Ben-Lomond blaw,
And bar the doors wi' driving snaw, . . .
I grudge a wee the great folks' gift,
That live so bien an' snug:
I tent less, and want less
Their roomy fire-side;
But hanker and canker
To see their cursed pride.

It's hardly in a body's power
To keep, at times, frae being sour,
To see how things are shar'd;
How best o' chiels are whiles in want,
While coofs on countless thousands rant,
And ken na how to wair 't." [1]

But "a man's a man for a' that," and the peasant is as good as the lord. There are men noble by nature, and they alone are noble; the coat is the business of the tailor, titles a matter for the Herald's office. "The rank is but the guinea's stamp, the man's the gowd for a' that."

Against men who reverse this natural equality Burns is pitiless; the least thing puts him out of temper. Read his "Address of Beelzebub, to the Right Honourable the Earl of Breadalbane, President of the Right Honourable and Honourable the Highland Society, which met on the 23d of May last at the Shakspeare, Covent Garden, to concert ways and means to frustrate the designs of five hundred Highlanders, who, as the society were informed by Mr. Mackenzie of Applecross, were so audacious, as to attempt an escape from their lawful lords and masters, whose property they were, by

[1] *First Epistle to Davie, a brother poet.*

emigrating from the lands of Mr. M'Donald of Glengarry to the wilds of Canada, in search of that fantastic thing —Liberty." Rarely was an insult more prolonged and more biting, and the threat is not far behind. He warns Scotch members like a revolutionist, to withdraw "that curst restriction on aquavitae," "get auld Scotland back her kettle:"

> "An', Lord, if ance they pit her till't,
> Her tartan petticoat she'll kilt,
> An' durk an' pistol at her belt,
> She'll tak the streets,
> An' rin her whittle to the hilt
> I' the first she meets!"[1]

In vain he writes, that

> "In politics if thou wouldst mix
> And mean thy fortunes be;
> Bear this in mind, be deaf and blind,
> Let great folks hear and see."[2]

Not alone did he see and hear, but he also spoke, and that aloud. He congratulates the French, on having repulsed conservative Europe, in arms against them. He celebrates the Tree of Liberty, planted "where ance the Bastile stood:"

> "Upo' this tree there grows sic fruit,
> Its virtues a' can tell, man;
> It raises man aboon the brute,
> It makes him ken himsel', man.
> Gif ance the peasant taste a bit,
> He's greater than a Lord, man. . . .

[1] *Earnest Cry and Prayer to the Scotch Representatives.*
[2] *The Creed of Poverty;* Chambers' *Life*, iv. 86.

King Loui' thought to cut it down,
When it was unco sma', man.
For this the watchman cracked his crown,
Cut off his head and a', man."[1]

A strange gaiety, savage and nervous, and which, in better style, resembles that of the *Ça ira*.

Burns is hardly more tender to the church. At that time the strait puritanical garment began to give way. Already the learned world of Edinburgh had Frenchified, widened, adapted it to the fashions of society, decked it with ornaments, not very brilliant, it is true, but select. In the lower strata of society dogma became less rigid, and approached by degrees the looseness of Arminius and Socinus. John Goldie, a merchant, had quite recently discussed the authority of Scripture.[2] John Taylor had denied original sin. Burns' father, pious as he was, inclined to liberal and humane doctrines, and detracted from the province of faith to add to that of reason. Burns, after his wont, pushed things to an extreme, thought himself a deist, saw in the Saviour only an inspired man, reduced religion to an inner and poetic sentiment, and attacked with his railleries the paid and patented orthodox people. Since Voltaire, no literary man in religious matters was more bitter or more jocose. According to him, ministers are shopkeepers trying to cheat each other out of their customers, decrying at the top of their voice the shop next door, puffing their drugs in numberless advertisements, and here and there setting up fairs to push the trade. These "holy fairs" are gatherings of the pious, where the sacrament is administered. One after another the clergymen preach

[1] *The Tree of Liberty.* [2] 1780.

and thunder, in particular a Rev. Mr. Moodie, who raves and fumes to throw light on points of faith—a terrible figure:

"Should Hornie, as in ancient days,
'Mong sons o' God present him,
The vera sight o' Moodie's face
To's ain het hame had sent him
Wi' fright that day.

Hear how he clears the points o' faith
Wi' rattlin' an' wi' thumpin'!
Now meekly calm, now wild in wrath,
He's stampin' an' he's jumpin'!
His lengthen'd chin, his turn'd-up snout,
His eldritch squeel and gestures,
Oh! how they fire the heart devout,
Like cantharidian plasters,
On sic a day!"[1]

The minister grows hoarse; now "Smith opens out his cauld harangues," then two more ministers speak. At last the audience rest, "the Change-house fills," and people begin to eat; each brings cakes and cheese from his bag; the young folks have their arms round their lasses' waists. That was an attitude to listen in! There is a great noise in the inn; the cans rattle on the board; whisky flows, and provides arguments to the tipplers commenting on the sermons. They demolish carnal reason, and exalt free faith. Arguments and stamping, shouts of sellers and drinkers, all mingle together. It is a "holy fair:"

"But now the Lord's ain trumpet touts,
Till a' the hills are rairin',
An' echoes back return the shouts;
Black Russell is na sparin';

[1] *The Holy Fair.*

His piercing words, like Highlan' swords,
Divide the joints and marrow.
His talk o' hell, where devils dwell,
Our vera sauls does harrow
Wi' fright that day.

A vast unbottom'd boundless pit,
Fill'd fu' o' lowin' brunstane,
Wha's raging flame, an scorchin' heat,
Wad melt the hardest whunstane.
The half-asleep start up wi' fear,
An' think they hear it roarin',
When presently it does appear
'Twas but some neebor snorin'
Asleep that day. . . .

How monie hearts this day converts
O' sinners and o' lasses!
Their hearts o' stane, gin night, are gane,
As saft as ony flesh is.
There's some are fou o' love divine,
There's some are fou o' brandy."[1]
Etc. etc.

The young men meet the girls, and the devil does a better business than God. A fine ceremony and morality! Let us cherish it carefully, and our wise theology too, which damns men.

As for that poor dog common sense, which bites so hard, let us send him across seas; let him go "and bark in France." For where shall we find better men than our "unco guid"—Holy Willie for instance? He feels himself predestinated, full of never-failing grace; therefore all who resist him resist God, and are fit only to be punished; may He "blast their name, who bring

[1] *The Holy Fair.*

thy elders to disgrace, and public shame."[1] Burns says also:

"An honest man may like a glass,
An honest man may like a lass,
But mean revenge an' malice fause
He'll still disdain;
An then cry zeal for gospel laws
Like some we ken. . . .
. . . I rather would be
An atheist clean,
Than under gospel colours hid be
Just for a screen."[2]

There is a beauty, an honesty, a happiness outside the conventionalities and hypocrisy, beyond correct preachings and proper drawing-rooms, unconnected with gentlemen in white ties and reverends in new bands.

In 1785 Burns wrote his masterpiece, the *Jolly Beggars*, like the *Gueux* of Béranger; but how much more picturesque, varied, and powerful! It is the end of autumn, the gray leaves float on the gusts of the wind; a joyous band of vagabonds, happy devils, come for a junketing at the change-house of Poosie Nansie:

"Wi' quaffing and laughing
They ranted and they sang;
Wi' jumping and thumping
The very girdle rang."

First, by the fire, in old red rags, is a soldier, and his old woman is with him; the jolly old girl has drunk freely; he kisses her, and she again pokes out her greedy lips; the coarse loud kisses smack like "a cadger's

[1] *Holy Willie's Prayer.* [2] *Epistle to the Rev. John M'Math.*

whip." "Then staggering and swaggering, he roar'd this ditty up:"

"I lastly was with Curtis, among the floating batt'ries,
And there I left for witness an arm and a limb;
Yet let my country need me, with Elliot to head me,
I'd clatter on my stumps at the sound of a drum. . . .
He ended; and the kebars sheuk,
Aboon the chorus' roar;
While frighted rattons backward leuk,
And seek the benmost bore."

Now it is the "doxy's" turn:

"I once was a maid, tho' I cannot tell when,
And still my delight is in proper young men. . . .
Some one of a troop of dragoons was my daddie,
No wonder I'm fond of a sodger laddie.
The first of my loves was a swaggering blade,
To rattle the thundering drum was his trade. . . .
The sword I forsook for the sake of the church. . . .
Full soon I grew sick of my sanctified sot,
The regiment at large for a husband I got,
From the gilded spontoon to the fife I was ready,
I asked no more but a sodger laddie.
But the peace it reduc'd me to beg in despair,
Till I met my old boy at a Cunningham fair;
His rags regimental they flutter'd so gaudy,
My heart it rejoic'd at a sodger laddie. . .
But whilst with both hands I can hold the glass steady,
Here's to thee, my hero, my sodger laddie."

This is certainly a free and easy style, and the poet is not mealy-mouthed. His other characters are in the same taste, a Merry Andrew, a raucle carlin (a stout beldame), a "pigmy-scraper wi' his fiddle," a travelling

tinker,—all in rags, brawlers and gipsies, who fight, bang, and kiss each other, and make the glasses ring with the noise of their good humour:

> "They toomed their pocks, and pawned their duds,
> They scarcely left to co'er their fuds,
> To quench their lowin' drouth."

And their chorus rolls about like thunder, shaking the rafters and walls.

> "A fig for those by law protected!
> Liberty's a glorious feast!
> Courts for cowards were erected,
> Churches built to please the priest!
>
> What is title? What is treasure?
> What is reputation's care?
> If we lead a life of pleasure,
> 'Tis no matter how or where!
>
> With the ready trick and fable,
> Round we wander all the day;
> And at night, in barn or stable,
> Hug our doxies on the hay.
>
> Life is all a variorum,
> We regard not how it goes;
> Let them cant about decorum,
> Who have characters to lose.
>
> Here's to budgets, bags and wallets!
> Here's to all the wandering train!
> Here's our ragged brats and callets!
> One and all cry out—Amen."

Has any man better spoken the language of rebels and levellers? There is here, however, something else than

the instinct of destruction and an appeal to the senses; there is hatred of cant and return to nature. Burns sings:

> "Morality, thou deadly bane,
> Thy tens o' thousands thou hast slain;
> Vain is his hope, whose stay and trust is
> In moral mercy, truth and justice!"[1]

Mercy! this grand word renews all. Now, as formerly, eighteen centuries ago, men rose above legal formulas and prescriptions; now, as formerly, under Virgil and Marcus Aurelius, refined sensibility and wide sympathies embraced beings who seemed for ever out of the pale of society and law. Burns pities, and that sincerely, a wounded hare, a mouse whose nest was upturned by his plough, a mountain daisy. Is there such a very great difference between man, beast, or plant? A mouse stores up, calculates, suffers like a man:

> "I doubt na, whiles, but thou may thieve;
> What then? poor beastie, thou maun live."

We even no longer wish to curse the fallen angels, the grand malefactors, Satan and his troop. Like the "randie, gangrel bodies, who in Poosie Nancy's held the splore," they have their good points, and perhaps after all are not so bad as people say:

> "Hear me, auld Hangie, for a wee,
> An' let poor damned bodies be;
> I'm sure sma' pleasure it can gie,
> E'en to a deil,
> To skelp an' scaud poor dogs like me,
> An' hear us squeel! . . .

[1] *A Dedication to Gavin Hamilton.*

Then you, ye auld, snic-drawing dog!
Ye came to Paradise incog.,
An' played on man a cursed brogue,
(Black be your fa'!)
An' gied the infant warld a shog,
'Maist ruin'd a'. . . .

But, fare you weel, auld Nickie-ben!
O wad ye tak a thought an' men'!
Ye aiblins might—I dinna ken—
Still hae a stake—
I'm wae to think upo' yon den,
Ev'n for your sake."[1]

We see that he speaks to the devil as to an unfortunate comrade, a disagreeable fellow, but fallen into trouble. Let us take another step, and we will see in a contemporary, Goethe, that Mephistopheles himself is not overmuch damned; his god, the modern god, tolerates him and tells him he has never hated such as he. For wide conciliating nature assembles in her company, on equal terms, the ministers of destruction and life. In this deep change the ideal changes; citizen and orderly life, strict Puritan duty, do not exhaust all the powers of man. Burns cries out in favour of instinct and enjoyment, so as to seem epicurean. He has genuine gaiety, a glow of jocularity; laughter commends itself to him; he praises it as well as the good suppers of good comrades, where wine is plentiful, pleasantry abounds, ideas pour forth, poetry sparkles, and causes a carnival of beautiful figures and good-humoured people to move about in the human brain.

He always was in love.[2] He made love the great

[1] *Address to the Deil.*

[2] He himself says: "I have been all along a miserable dupe to Love."

end of existence, to such a degree that at the club which he founded with the young men of Tarbolton, every member was obliged "to be the declared lover of one or more fair ones." From the age of fifteen this was his main business. He had for companion in his harvest toil a sweet and lovable girl, a year younger than himself: "In short, she, altogether unwittingly to herself, initiated me in that delicious passion, which, in spite of acid disappointment, gin-horse prudence, and book-worm philosophy, I hold to be the first of human joys, our dearest blessing here below."[1] He sat beside her with a joy which he did not understand, to "pick out from her little hand the cruel nettle-stings and thistles." He had many other less innocent fancies; it seems to me that by his very nature he was in love with all women: as soon as he saw a pretty one, he grew lively; his commonplace-book and his songs show that he set off in pursuit after every butterfly, golden or not, which seemed about to settle. Moreover he did not confine himself to Platonic reveries; he was as free of action as of words; broad jests crop up freely in his verses. He calls himself an unregenerate heathen, and he is right. He has even written obscene verses; and Lord Byron refers to a quantity of his letters, of course unpublished, than which worse could not be imagined:[2] it was the excess of the sap which overflowed in him, and soiled the bark. Doubtless he did not boast about these excesses, he rather repented of them; but as to the uprising and blooming of the free poetic life in the open air, he found no fault with it. He thought that

His brother Gilbert said: "He was constantly the victim of some fair enslaver."

[1] Chambers' *Life of Burns*, i. 12.

[2] Byron's Works, ed. Moore, 17 vols., ii. 302, *Journal*, Dec. 13, 1813.

love, with the charming dreams it brings, poetry, pleasure, and the rest, are beautiful things, suitable to human instincts, and therefore to the designs of God. In short, in contrast with morose Puritanism, he approved joy and spoke well of happiness.[1]

Not that he was a mere epicurean; on the contrary, he could be religious. When, after the death of his father, he prayed aloud in the evening, he drew tears from those present; and his *Cottar's Saturday Night* is the most heartfelt of virtuous idyls. I even believe he was fundamentally religious. He advised his "pupil as he tenders his own peace, to keep up a regular warm intercourse with the Deity." What he made fun of was official worship; but as for religion, the language of the soul, he was greatly attached to it. Often before Dugald Stewart at Edinburgh, he disapproved of the sceptical jokes which he heard at the supper table. He thought he had "every evidence for the reality of a life beyond the stinted bourne of our present existence;" and many a time, side by side with a jocose satire, we find in his writings stanzas full of humble repentance, confiding fervour, or Christian resignation. These, if you will, are a poet's contradictions, but they are also a poet's divinations; under these apparent variations there rises a new ideal; old narrow moralities are to give place to the wide sympathy of the modern man, who loves the beautiful wherever it meets him, and who, refusing to mutilate human nature, is at once Pagan and Christian.

This originality and divining instinct exist in his style as in his ideas. The specialty of the age in which we live, and which he inaugurated, is to blot out

[1] See a passage from Burns' commonplace-book in Chambers' *Life of Burns*, i. 93.

rigid distinctions of class, catechism, and style; academic, moral, or social conventions are falling away, and we claim in society a mastery for individual merit, in morality for inborn generosity, in literature for genuine feeling. Burns was the first to enter on this track, and he often pursues it to the end. When he wrote verses, it was not on calculation or in obedience to fashion: "My passions, when once lighted up, raged like so many devils, till they got vent in rhyme; and then the conning over my verses, like a spell, soothed all into quiet."[1] He hummed them to old Scotch airs which he passionately loved, as he drove his plough, and which, he says, as soon as he sang them, brought ideas and rhymes to his lips. That, indeed, was natural poetry; not forced in a hothouse, but born of the soil between the furrows, side by side with music, amidst the gloom and beauty of the climate, like the violet heather of the moors and the hillside. We can understand that it gave vigour to his tongue. For the first time this man spoke as men speak, or rather as they think, without premeditation, with a mixture of all styles, familiar and terrible, hiding an emotion under a joke, tender and jeering in the same place, apt to place side by side tap-room trivialities and the high language of poetry,[2] so indifferent was he to rules, content to exhibit his feeling as it came to him, and as he felt it. At last, after so many years, we escape from measured declamation, we hear a man's voice! and what is better still, we forget the voice in the emotion which it expresses, we feel this emotion reflected in ourselves,

[1] Chambers' *Life*, i. 38.

[2] See *Tam o' Shanter*, *Address to the Deil*, *The Jolly Beggars*, *A Man's a Man for a' that*, *Green Grow the Rashes*, etc.

we enter into relations with a soul. Then form seems to fade away and disappear: I think that this is the great feature of modern poetry; seven or eight times has Burns reached it.

He has done more; he has made his way, as we say now-a-days. On the publication of his first volume he became suddenly famous. Coming to Edinburgh, he was feasted, caressed, admitted on a footing of equality in the best drawing-rooms, amongst the great and the learned, loved of a woman who was almost a lady. For one season he was sought after, and he behaved worthily amidst these rich and noble people. He was respected, and even loved. A subscription brought him a second edition and five hundred pounds. He also at last had won his position, like the great French plebeians, amongst whom Rousseau was the first. Unfortunately he brought thither, like them, the vices of his condition and of his genius. A man does not rise with impunity, nor, above all, desire to rise with impunity: we also have our vices, and suffering vanity is the first of them. "Never did a heart pant more ardently than mine to be distinguished," said Burns. This grievous pride marred his talent, and threw him into follies. He laboured to attain a fine epistolary style, and brought ridicule on himself by imitating in his letters the men of the academy and the court. He wrote to his lady-loves with choice phrases, full of periods as pedantic as those of Dr. Johnson. Certainly we dare hardly quote them, the emphasis is so grotesque.[1] At other times he committed to his common-

[1] "O Clarinda, shall we not meet in a state, some yet unknown state of being, where the lavish hand of plenty shall minister to the highest wish of benevolence, and where the chill north-wind of prudence shall never blow over the flowery fields of enjoyment!"

place-book literary expressions that occurred to him, and six months afterwards sent them to his correspondents as extemporary effusions and natural improvisations. Even in his verses, often enough, he fell into a grand conventional style;[1] brought into play sighs, ardours, flames, even the big classical and mythological machinery. Béranger, who thought or called himself the poet of the people, did the same. A plebeian must have much courage to venture on always remaining himself, and never slipping on the court dress. Thus Burns, a Scottish villager, avoided, in speaking, all Scotch village expressions: he was pleased to show himself as well-bred as fashionable folks. It was forcibly and by surprise that his genius drew him away from the proprieties: twice out of three times his feeling was marred by his pretentiousness.

His success lasted one winter, after which the wide incurable wound of plebeianism made itself felt,—I mean that he was obliged to work for his living. With the money gained by the second edition of his poems he took a little farm. It was a bad bargain; and, moreover, we can imagine that he had not the money-grubbing character necessary. He says: "I might write you on farming, on building, on marketing; but my poor distracted mind is so torn, so jaded, so racked, and bedeviled with the task of the superlatively damned obligation to make one guinea do the business of three, that I detest, abhor, and swoon at the very word business." Soon he left his farm, with empty pockets, to fill at Dumfries the small post of exciseman, which

[1] *Epistle to James Smith:*

"O Life, how pleasant is thy morning,
Young Fancy's rays the hills adorning,
Cold-pausing Caution's lesson spurning!"

was worth, in all, £90 a year. In this fine employment he branded leather, gauged casks, tested the make of candles, issued licences for the transit of spirits. From his dunghills he passed to office work and grocery: what a life for such a man! He would have been unhappy, even if independent and rich. These great innovators, these poets, are all alike. What makes them poets is the violent afflux of sensations. They have a nervous mechanism more sensitive than ours; the objects which leave us cool, transport them suddenly beyond themselves. At the least shock their brain is set going, after which they once more fall flat, loathe existence, sit morose amidst the memories of their faults and their lost pleasures. Burns said: "My worst enemy is *moi-même*. . . . There are just two creatures I would envy: a horse in his wild state traversing the forests of Asia, or an oyster on some of the desert shores of Europe. The one has not a wish without enjoyment, the other has neither wish nor fear." He was always in extremes, at the height of exaltation or in the depth of depression; in the morning, ready to weep; in the evening at table or under the table; enamoured of Jean Armour, then on her refusal engaged to another, then returning to Jean, then quitting her, then taking her back, amidst much scandal, many blots on his character, still more disgust. In such heads ideas are like cannon balls: the man, hurled onwards, bursts through everything, shatters himself, begins again the next day, but in a contrary direction, and ends by finding nothing left in him, but ruins within and without. Burns had never been prudent, and was so less than ever, after his success at Edinburgh. He had enjoyed too much; he henceforth felt too acutely

the painful sting of modern man, namely the disproportion between the desire for certain things and the power of obtaining them. Debauch had all but spoiled his fine imagination, which had before been "the chief source of his happiness;" and he confessed that, instead of tender reveries, he had now nothing but sensual desires. He had been kept drinking till six in the morning; he was very often drunk at Dumfries, not that the whisky was very good, but it makes thoughts to whirl about in the head; and hence poets, like the poor, are fond of it. Once at Mr. Riddell's he made himself so tipsy that he insulted the lady of the house; next day he sent her an apology which was not accepted, and, out of spite, wrote rhymes against her: a lamentable excess, betraying an unseated mind. At thirty-seven he was worn out. One night, having drunk too much, he sat down and went to sleep in the street. It was January, and he caught rheumatic fever. His family wanted to call in a doctor. "What business has a physician to waste his time on me?" he said; "I am a poor pigeon not worth plucking." He was horribly thin, could not sleep, and could not stand on his legs. "As to my individual self, I am tranquil. But Burns' poor widow and half a dozen of his dear little ones, there I am as weak as a woman's tear." He was even afraid he should not die in peace, and had the bitterness of being obliged to beg. Here is a letter he wrote to a friend: "A rascal of a haberdasher, taking into his head that I am dying, has commenced a process against me, and will infallibly put my emaciated body into jail. Will you be so good as to accommodate me, and that by return of post, with ten pounds? O James! did you know the pride of my heart, you would

feel doubly for me! Alas, I am not used to beg!"[1] He died a few days afterwards, at thirty-eight. His wife was lying-in of her fifth child at the time of her husband's funeral.

III.

A sad life, most often the life of the men in advance of their age; it is not wholesome to go too quick. Burns was so much in advance, that it took forty years to catch him. At this time in England, the conservatives and the believers took the lead before sceptics and revolutionists. The constitution was liberal, and seemed to be a guarantee of rights; the church was popular, and seemed to be the support of morality. Practical capacity and speculative incapacity turned the mind aside from the propounded innovations, and bound them down to the established order. The people found themselves well off in their great feudal house, widened and accommodated to modern needs; they thought it beautiful, they were proud of it; and national instinct, like public opinion, declared against the innovators who would throw it down to build it up again. Suddenly a violent shock changed this instinct into a passion, and this opinion into fanaticism. The French Revolution, at first admired as a sister, had shown itself a fury and a monster. Pitt declared in Parliament, "that one of the leading features of this (French) Government was the extinction of religion and the destruction of property."[2] Amidst universal applause, the whole thinking and influential class rose to stamp out this party of

[1] Chambers' *Life*; Letter to Mr. Ja. Burnes, iv. 205.

[2] *The Speeches of William Pitt*, 2d ed. 3 vols. 1808, ii. 17, Jan. 21, 1794.

robbers, united brigands, atheists on principle; and Jacobinism, sprung from blood to sit in purple, was persecuted even in its child and champion "Buonaparte, who is now the sole organ of all that was formerly dangerous and pestiferous in the revolution."[1] Under this national rage liberal ideas dwindled; the most illustrious friends of Fox—Burke, Windham, Spencer—abandoned him: out of a hundred and sixty partisans in the House of Commons, only fifty remained to him. The great Whig party seemed to be disappearing; and in 1799, the strongest minority that could be collected against the Government was twenty-nine. Yet English Jacobinism was taken by the throat and held down:

"The *Habeas Corpus* Act was repeatedly suspended. . . . Writers who propounded doctrines adverse to monarchy and aristocracy, were proscribed and punished without mercy. It was hardly safe for a republican to avow his political creed over his beefsteak and his bottle of port at a chophouse. . . . Men of cultivated mind and polished manners were (in Scotland), for offences which at Westminster would have been treated as mere misdemeanours, sent to herd with felons at Botany Bay."[2]

But the intolerance of the nation aggravated that of the Government. If any one had dared to avow democratic sentiments, he would have been insulted. The papers represented the innovators as wretches and public enemies. The mob in Birmingham burned the houses of Priestley and the Unitarians. And in the end Priestley was obliged to leave England.

New theories could not arise in this society armed against new theories. Yet the revolution made its

[1] *The Speeches of William Pitt*, iii. 152, Feb. 17, 1800.
[2] Macaulay's Works, vii.; *Life of William Pitt*, 396.

entrance; it entered disguised, and through an indirect way, so as not to be recognised. It was not social ideas, as in France, that were transformed, nor philosophical ideas as in Germany, but literary ideas; the great rising tide of the modern mind, which elsewhere overturned the whole edifice of human conditions and speculations, succeeded here only at first in changing style and taste. It was a slight change, at least apparently, but on the whole of equal value with the others; for this renovation in the manner of writing is a renovation in the manner of thinking: the one led to all the rest, as a central pivot being set in motion causes all the indented wheels to move also.

Wherein consists this reform of style? Before defining it, I prefer to exhibit it; and for that purpose, we must study the character and life of a man who was the first to use it, without any system—William Cowper: for his talent is but the picture of his character, and his poems but the echo of his life. He was a delicate, timid child, of a tremulous sensibility, passionately tender, who, having lost his mother at six, was almost at once subjected to the fagging and brutality of a public school. These, in England, are peculiar: a boy of about fifteen singled him out as a proper object upon whom he might practise the cruelty of his temper; and the poor little fellow, ceaselessly ill-treated, "conceived," he says, "such a dread of his (tormentor's) figure, . . . that I well remember being afraid to lift my eyes upon him higher than his knees; and that I knew him better by his shoe-buckles than by any other part of his dress."[1] At the age of nine melancholy seized him, not the sweet reverie which we call by that name, but the profound

[1] *The Works of W. Cowper*, ed. Southey, 8 vols. 1843.

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dejection, gloomy and continual despair, the horrible malady of the nerves and the soul, which leads to suicide, Puritanism, and madness. "Day and night I was upon the rack, lying down in horror, and rising up in despair."[1]

The evil changed form, diminished, but did not leave him. As he had only a small fortune, though born of a high family, he accepted, without reflection, the offer of his uncle, who wished to give him a place as clerk of the journals of the House of Lords; but he had to undergo an examination, and his nerves were unstrung at the very idea of having to speak in public. For six months he tried to prepare himself; but he read without understanding. His continual misery brought on at last a nervous fever. Cowper writes of himself: "The feelings of a man when he arrives at the place of execution, are probably much like mine, every time I set my foot in the office, which was every day, for more than a half year together.[2] In this situation, such a fit of passion has sometimes seized me, when alone in my chambers, that I have cried out aloud, and cursed the hour of my birth; lifting up my eyes to heaven not as a suppliant, but in the hellish spirit of rancorous reproach and blasphemy against my Maker."[3] The day of examination came on: he hoped he was going mad, so that he might escape from it; and as his reason held out, he thought even of "self-murder." At last, "in a horrible dismay of soul," insanity came, and he was placed in an asylum, whilst "his conscience was scaring him, and the avenger of blood pursuing him"[4] to the extent even of thinking himself damned, like

[1] *The Works of W. Cowper*, ed. Southey, i. 18.
[2] *Ibid.* 79. [3] *Ibid.* 81. [4] *Ibid.* 97.

Bunyan and the first Puritans. After several months his reason returned, but it bore traces of the strange lands where it had journeyed alone. He remained sad, like a man who thought himself in disfavour with God, and felt himself incapable of an active life. However, a clergyman, Mr. Unwin, and his wife, very pious and very regular people, had taken charge of him. He tried to busy himself mechanically, for instance, in making rabbit-hutches, in gardening, and in taming hares. He employed the rest of the day like a Methodist, in reading Scripture or sermons, in singing hymns with his friends, and speaking of spiritual matters. This way of living, the wholesome country air, the maternal tenderness of Mrs. Unwin and Lady Austen, brought him a few gleams of light. They loved him so generously, and he was so lovable! Affectionate, full of freedom and innocent raillery, with a natural and charming imagination, a graceful fancy, an exquisite delicacy, and so unhappy! He was one of those to whom women devote themselves, whom they love maternally, first from compassion, then by attraction, because they find in them alone the consideration, the minute and tender attentions, the delicate observances which men's rude nature cannot give them, and which their more sensitive nature nevertheless craves. These sweet moments, however, did not last. He says: "My mind has always a melancholy cast, and is like some pools I have seen, which, though filled with a black and putrid water, will nevertheless in a bright day reflect the sunbeams from their surface." He smiled as well as he could, but with effort; it was the smile of a sick man who knows himself incurable, and tries to forget it for an instant, at least to make others forget it: "Indeed, I wonder that a sportive

thought should ever knock at the door of my intellects, and still more that it should gain admittance. It is as if harlequin should intrude himself into the gloomy chamber where a corpse is deposited in state. His antic gesticulations would be unseasonable at any rate, but more specially so if they should distort the features of the mournful attendants into laughter. But the mind, long wearied with the sameness of a dull, dreary prospect, will gladly fix his eyes on anything that may make a little variety in its contemplations, though it were but a kitten playing with her tail."[1] In reality, he had too delicate and too pure a heart: pious, irreproachable, austere, he thought himself unworthy of going to church, or even of praying to God. He says also: "As for happiness, he that once had communion with his Maker must be more frantic than ever I was yet, if he can dream of finding it at a distance from Him."[2] And elsewhere: "The heart of a Christian, mourning and yet rejoicing, (is) pierced with thorns, yet wreathed about with roses. I have the thorn without the rose. My brier is a wintry one; the flowers are withered, but the thorn remains." On his deathbed, when the clergyman told him to confide in the love of the Redeemer, who desired to save all men, he uttered a passionate cry, begging him not to give him such consolations. He thought himself lost, and had thought so all his life. One by one, under this terror all his faculties gave way. Poor charming soul, perishing like a frail flower transplanted from a warm land to the snow: the world's temperature was too rough for it;

[1] *The Works of W. Cowper*, ed. Southey; Letter to the Rev. John Newton, July 12, 1780.

[2] *Ibid.* Letter to Rev. J. Newton, August 5, 1786.

and the moral law, which should have supported it, tore it with its thorns.

Such a man does not write for the pleasure of making a noise. He made verses as he painted or worked at his bench to occupy himself, to distract his mind. His soul was too full; he need not go far for subjects. Picture this pensive figure, silently wandering and gazing along the banks of the Ouse. He gazes and dreams. A buxom peasant girl, with a basket on her arm; a distant cart slowly rumbling on behind horses in a sweat; a sparkling spring, which polishes the blue pebbles,—this is enough to fill him with sensations and thoughts. He returned, sat in his little summer-house, as large as a sedan-chair, the window of which opened out upon a neighbour's orchard, and the door on a garden full of pinks, roses, and honeysuckle. In this nest he laboured. In the evening, beside his friend, whose needles were working for him, he read, or listened to the drowsy sounds without. Rhymes are born in such a life as this. It sufficed for him, and for their birth. He did not need a more violent career: less harmonious or monotonous, it would have upset him; impressions small to us were great to him; and in a room, a garden, he found a world. In his eyes the smallest objects were poetical. It is evening; winter; the postman comes:

> "The herald of a noisy world,
> With spattered boots, strapp'd waist, and frozen locks;
> News from all nations lumbering at his back.
> True to his charge, the close-packed load behind,
> Yet careless what he brings, his one concern
> Is to conduct it to the destined inn;
> And, having dropped the expected bag, pass on.

He whistles as he goes, light-hearted wretch,
Cold and yet cheerful: messenger of grief
Perhaps to thousands, and of joy to some."[1]

At last we have the precious "close-packed load;" we open it; we wish to hear the many noisy voices it brings from London and the universe:

"Now stir the fire, and close the shutters fast,
Let fall the curtains, wheel the sofa round,
And while the bubbling and loud-hissing urn
Throws up a steamy column, and the cups,
That cheer but not inebriate, wait on each,
So let us welcome peaceful evening in."[2]

Then he unfolds the whole contents of the newspaper—politics, news, even advertisements—not as a mere realist, like so many writers of to-day, but as a poet; that is, as a man who discovers a beauty and harmony in the coals of a sparkling fire, or the movement of fingers over a piece of wool-work; for such is the poet's strange distinction. Objects not only spring up in his mind more powerful and more precise than they were of themselves, and before entering there; but also, once conceived, they are purified, ennobled, coloured, like gross vapours, which, being transfigured by distance and light, change into silky clouds, lined with purple and gold. For him there is a charm in the rolling folds of the vapour sent up by the tea-urn, sweetness in the concord of guests assembled around the same table in the same house. This one expression, "News from India," causes him to see India itself, "with her plumed and jewelled turban."[3] The mere notion of "excise" sets before his eyes "ten thousand casks, for ever dribbling out their

[1] *The Task*, iv.; *The Winter Evening*. [2] *Ibid.* [3] *Ibid.*

base contents, touched by the Midas finger of the State, (which) bleed gold for ministers to sport away."[1] Strictly speaking, nature is to him like a gallery of splendid and various pictures, which to us ordinary folk are always covered up with cloths. At most, now and then, a rent suffers us to imagine the beauties hid behind the uninteresting curtains; but the poet raises these curtains, one and all, and sees a picture where we see but a covering. Such is the new truth which Cowper's poems brought to light. We know from him that we need no longer go to Greece, Rome, to the palaces, heroes, and academicians, in search of poetic objects. They are quite near us. If we see them not, it is because we do not know how to look for them; the fault is in our eyes, not in the things. We may find poetry, if we wish, at our fireside, and amongst the beds of our kitchen-garden.[2]

Is the kitchen-garden indeed poetical? To-day, perhaps; but to-morrow, if my imagination is barren, I shall see there nothing but carrots and other kitchen stuff. It is my feelings which are poetical, which I must respect, as the most precious flower of beauty. Hence a new style. We need no longer, after the old oratorical fashion, box up a subject in a regular plan, divide it into symmetrical portions, arrange ideas into files, like the pieces on a draught-board. Cowper takes the first subject that comes to hand—one which Lady Austen gave him at hap-hazard—the *Sofa*, and speaks about it for a couple of pages; then he goes whither

[1] *The Task*, iv.; *The Winter Evening*.

[2] Crabbe may also be considered one of the masters and renovators of poetry, but his style is too classical, and he has been rightly nicknamed "a Pope in worsted stockings."

the bent of his mind leads him, describing a winter evening, a number of interiors and landscapes, mingling here and there all kinds of moral reflections, stories, dissertations, opinions, confidences, like a man who thinks aloud before the most intimate and beloved of his friends. Let us look at his great poem, the *Task*. "The best didactic poems," says Southey, "when compared with the *Task*, are like formal gardens in comparison with woodland scenery." If we enter into details, the contrast is greater still. He does not seem to dream that he is being listened to; he only speaks to himself. He does not dwell on his ideas, as the classical writers do, to set them in relief, and make them stand out by repetitions and antitheses; he marks his sensation, and that is all. We follow this sensation in him as it gradually springs up; we see it rising from a former one, swelling, falling, remounting, as we see vapour issuing from a spring, and insensibly rising, unrolling, and developing its shifting forms. Thought, which in others was congealed and rigid, becomes here mobile and fluent; the rectilinear verse grows flexible; the noble vocabulary widens its scope to let in vulgar words of conversation and life. At length poetry has again become lifelike; we no longer listen to words, but we feel emotions; it is no longer an author, but a man who speaks. His whole life is there, perfect, beneath its black lines, without falsehood or concoction; his whole effort is bent on removing falsehood and concoction. When he describes his little river, his dear Ouse, "slow winding through a level plain of spacious meads, with cattle sprinkled o'er,"[1] he sees it with his inner eye; and each word, cæsura, sound, answers to a change

[1] *The Task*, i.; *The Sofa*.

of that inner vision. It is so in all his verses; they are full of personal emotions, genuinely felt, never altered or disguised; on the contrary, fully expressed, with their transient shades and fluctuations; in a word, as they are, that is, in the process of production and destruction, not all complete, motionless, and fixed, as the old style represented them. Herein consists the great revolution of the modern style. The mind, outstripping the known rules of rhetoric and eloquence, penetrates into profound psychology, and no longer employs words except to mark emotions.

IV.

Now[1] appeared the English romantic school, closely resembling the French in its doctrines, origin, and alliances, in the truths which it discovered, the exaggerations it committed, and the scandal it excited. The followers of that school formed a sect, a sect of "dissenters in poetry," who spoke out aloud, kept themselves close together, and repelled settled minds by the audacity and novelty of their theories. For their foundation were attributed to them the anti-social principles and the sickly sensibility of Rousseau; in short, a sterile and misanthropical dissatisfaction with the present institutions of society. Southey, one of their leaders, began by being a Socinian and Jacobin; and one of his first poems, *Wat Tyler*, cited the glory of the past Jacquerie in support of the present revolution. Another, Coleridge, a poor fellow, who had served as a dragoon, his brain stuffed with incoherent reading and humanitarian dreams, thought of founding

[1] 1793-1794.

in America a communist republic, purged of kings and priests; then, having turned Unitarian, steeped himself at Göttingen in heretical and mystical theories on the Logos and the absolute. Wordsworth himself, the third and most moderate, had begun with enthusiastic verses against kings:

> "Great God, . . . grant that every sceptred child of clay,
> Who cries presumptuous, 'Here the flood shall stay,'
> May in its progress see thy guiding hand,
> And cease the acknowledged purpose to withstand;
> Or, swept in anger from the insulted shore,
> Sink with his servile bands, to rise no more!"[1]

But these rages and aspirations did not last long; and at the end of a few years, the three, brought back into the pale of Church and State, became, Coleridge, a Pittite journalist, Wordsworth, a distributor of stamps, and Southey, poet-laureate; all zealous converts, decided Anglicans, and intolerant Conservatives. In point of taste, however, they had advanced, not retired. They had violently broken with tradition, and leaped over all classical culture to take their models from the Renaissance and the middle-age. One of their friends, Charles Lamb, like Saint-Beuve, had discovered and restored the sixteenth century. The most unpolished dramatists, like Marlowe, seemed to these men admirable; and they sought in the collections of Percy and Warton, in the old national ballads and ancient poetry of foreign lands, the fresh and primitive accent which had been wanting in classical literature, and whose presence seemed to them to be a sign of truth and

[1] Wordsworth's Works, new edition, 1870, 6 vols.; *Descriptive Sketches during a Pedestrian Tour*, i. 42.

beauty. Above every other reform, they laboured to destroy the grand aristocratical and oratorical style, such as it sprang from methodical analyses and court polish. They proposed to adapt to poetry the ordinary language of conversation, such as is spoken in the middle and lower classes, and to replace studied phrases and a lofty vocabulary by natural tones and plebeian words. In place of the classical mould, they tried stanzas, sonnets, ballads, blank verse, with the roughness and subdivisions of the primitive poets. They adopted or arranged the metres and diction of the thirteenth and sixteenth centuries. Charles Lamb wrote an archaic tragedy, *John Woodvil*, which we might fancy to have been written during Elizabeth's reign. Others, like Southey, and Coleridge, in particular, manufactured totally new rhythms, as happy at times, and at times also as unfortunate, as those of Victor Hugo: for instance, a verse in which accents, and not syllables, were counted;[1] a singular medley of confused attempts, manifest abortions, and original inventions. The plebeian having doffed the aristocratical costume, sought another; borrowed one piece of his dress from the knights or the barbarians, another from peasants or journalists, not too critical of incongruities, pretentious and satisfied with his motley and badly sewn cloak, till at last, after many attempts and many rents, he ended by knowing himself, and selecting the dress that fitted him.

In this confusion of labours two great ideas stand out: the first producing historical poetry, the second philosophical; the one especially manifest in Southey

[1] In English poetry as since modified, no one dreams of limiting the number of syllables, even in blank verse.—TR.

and Walter Scott, the other in Wordsworth and Shelley; both European, and displayed with equal brilliancy in France by Hugo, Lamartine, and Musset; with greater brilliancy in Germany by Goethe, Schiller, Rückert, and Heine; both so profound, that none of their representatives, except Goethe, divined their scope; and hardly now, after more than half a century, can we define their nature, so as to forecast their results.

The first consists in saying, or rather foreboding, that our ideal is not the ideal; it is only one ideal, but there are others. The barbarian, the feudal man, the cavalier of the Renaissance, the Mussulman, the Indian, each age and each race has conceived its beauty, which was a beauty. Let us enjoy it, and for this purpose put ourselves entirely in the place of the discoverers; for it will not suffice to depict, as the previous novelists and dramatists have done, modern and national manners under old and foreign names; let us paint the sentiments of other ages and other races with their own features, however different these features may be from our own, and however unpleasing to our taste. Let us show our hero as he was, grotesque or not, with his true costume and speech: let him be fierce and superstitious if he was so; let us dash the barbarian with blood, and load the Covenanter with his bundle of biblical texts. Then one by one on the literary stage men saw the vanished or distant civilisations return; first the middle age and the Renaissance; then Arabia, Hindostan, and Persia; then the classical age, and the eighteenth century itself; and the historic taste becomes so eager, that from literature the contagion spread to other arts. The theatre changed its

conventional costumes and decorations into true ones. Architecture built Roman villas in our northern climates, and feudal towers amidst our modern security. Painters travelled to imitate local colouring, and studied to reproduce moral colouring. Every man became a tourist and an archæologist; the human mind quitting its individual sentiments to adopt all sentiments really felt, and finally all possible sentiments, found its pattern in the great Goethe, who by his *Tasso*, *Iphigenia*, *Divan*, his second part of *Faust*, became a citizen of all nations and a contemporary of all ages, seemed to live at pleasure at every point of time and place, and gave an idea of universal mind. Yet this literature, as it approached perfection, approached its limit, and was only developed in order to die. Men did comprehend at last that attempted resurrections are always incomplete, that every imitation is only an imitation, that the modern accent infallibly penetrates the words which we place in the mouths of ancient characters, that every picture of manners must be indigenous and contemporaneous, and that archaic literature is essentially untrue. People saw at last that it is in the writers of the past that we must seek the portraiture of the past; that there are no Greek tragedies but the Greek tragedies; that the concocted novel must give place to authentic memoirs, as the fabricated ballad to the spontaneous; in other words, that historical literature must vanish and become transformed into criticism and history, that is, into exposition and commentary of documents.

How shall we select in this multitude of travellers and historians, disguised as poets? They abound like swarms of insects, hatched on a summer's day

amidst a rank vegetation; they buzz and glitter, and the mind is lost in their sparkle and hum. Which shall I quote? Thomas Moore, the gayest and most French of all, a witty railer,[1] too graceful and *recherché*, writing descriptive odes on the Bermudas, sentimental Irish melodies, a poetic Egyptian tale,[2] a romantic poem on Persia and India;[3] Lamb, a restorer of the old drama; Coleridge, a thinker and dreamer, a poet and critic, who in *Christabel* and the *Ancient Mariner* reopened the vein of the supernatural and the fantastic; Campbell, who, having begun with a didactic poem on the *Pleasures of Hope*, entered the new school without giving up his noble and half-classical style, and wrote American and Celtic poems, only slightly Celtic and American; in the first rank, Southey, a clever man, who, after several mistakes in his youth, became the professed defender of aristocracy and cant, an indefatigable reader, an inexhaustible writer, crammed with erudition, gifted in imagination, famed like Victor Hugo for the freshness of his innovations, the combative tone of his prefaces, the splendours of his picturesque curiosity, having spanned the universe and all history with his poetic shows, and embraced in the endless web of his verse, Joan of Arc, Wat Tyler, Roderick the Goth, Madoc, Thalaba, Kehama, Celtic and Mexican traditions, Arabic and Indian legends, successively a Catholic, a Mussulman, a Brahmin, but only in verse; in reality, a prudent and respectable Protestant. The above-mentioned authors have to be taken as examples merely—there are dozens behind; and I think that, of all fine visible or imaginable sceneries, of all great real or legendary events, at all times, in the four

[1] *The Fudge Family.* [2] *The Epicurean.* [3] *Lalla Rookh.*

quarters of the world, not one has escaped them. The diorama they show us is very brilliant; unfortunately we perceive that it is manufactured. If we would have its fellow picture, let us imagine ourselves at the opera. The decorations are splendid, we see them coming down from above, that is, from the ceiling, thrice in an act; lofty Gothic cathedrals, whose rose-windows glow in the rays of the setting sun, whilst processions wind round the pillars, and the lights flicker over the elaborate copes and the gold embroidery of the priestly vestments; mosques and minarets, moving caravans creeping afar over the yellow sand, whose lances and canopies, ranged in line, fringe the immaculate whiteness of the horizon; Indian paradises, where the heaped roses swarm in myriads, where fountains mingle their plumes of pearls, where the lotus spreads its large leaves, where thorny plants raise their many thousand purple calices around the apes and crocodiles which are worshipped as divinities, and crawl in the thickets. Meantime the dancing-girls lay their hands on their heart with deep and delicate emotion, the tenor sing that they are ready to die, tyrants roll forth their deep bass voice, the orchestra struggles hard, accompanying the variations of sentiment with the gentle sounds of flutes, the lugubrious clamours of the trombones, the angelic melodies of the harps; till at last, when the heroine sets her foot on the throat of the traitor, it breaks out triumphantly with its thousand vibrant voices harmonised into a single strain. A fine spectacle! we depart mazed, deafened; the senses give way under this inundation of splendours; but as we return home, we ask ourselves what we have learnt, felt—whether we have, in truth, felt anything. After

all, there is little here but decoration and scenery; the sentiments are factitious; they are operatic sentiments: the authors are only clever men, libretti-makers, manufacturers of painted canvas; they have talent without genius; they draw their ideas not from the heart, but from the head. Such is the impression left by *Lalla Rookh*, *Thalaba*, *Roderick the last of the Goths*, *The Curse of Kehama*, and the rest of these poems. They are great decorative machines suited to the fashion. The mark of genius is the discovery of some wide unexplored region in human nature, and this mark fails them; they prove only much cleverness and knowledge. After all, I prefer to see the East in Orientals from the East, rather than in Orientals in England; in Vyasa or Firdousi, rather than in Southey[1] and Moore. These poems may be descriptive or historical; they are less so than the texts, notes, emendations, and justifications which their authors carefully print at the foot of the page.

Beyond all general causes which have fettered this literature, there is a national one: the mind of these men is not sufficiently flexible, and too moral. Their imitation is only literal. They know past times and distant lands only as antiquaries and travellers. When they mention a custom, they put their authorities in a foot-note; they do not present themselves before the public without testimonials; they establish by weighty certificates that they have not committed an error in topography or costume. Moore, like Southey, named his authorities; Sir John Malcolm, Sir William Ouseley, Mr. Carey, and others, who returned from the

[1] See also *The History of the Caliph Vathek*, a fantastic but powerfully written tale, by W. Beckford, published first in French in 1784.

East, and had lived there, state that his descriptions are wonderfully faithful, that they thought that Moore had travelled in the East. In this respect their minuteness is ridiculous;[1] and their notes, lavished without stint, show that their matter-of-fact public required to ascertain whether their poetical commodities were genuine produce. But that broader truth, which lies in penetrating into the feelings of characters, escaped them; these feelings are too strange and immoral. When Moore tried to translate and recast Anacreon, he was told that his poetry was fit for "the stews."[2] To write an Indian poem, we must be pantheistical at heart, a little mad, and pretty generally visionary; to write a Greek poem, we must be polytheistic at heart, fundamentally pagan, and a naturalist by profession. This is the reason that Heine spoke so fitly of India, and Goethe of Greece. A genuine historian is not sure that his own civilisation is perfect, and lives as gladly out of his country as in it. Judge whether Englishmen can succeed in this style. In their eyes, there is only one rational civilisation, which is their own; every other morality is inferior, every other religion is extravagant. With such narrowness, how can they reproduce these other moralities and religions? Sympathy alone can restore extinguished or foreign manners, and sympathy here is forbidden. Under this narrow rule, historical poetry, which itself is hardly likely to live, languishes as though suffocated under a leaden cover.

One of them, a novelist, critic, historian, and poet, the favourite of his age, read over the whole of Europe, was compared and almost equalled to Shakspeare, had

[1] See the notes of Southey, worse than those of Chateaubriand in the *Martyrs*.

[2] *Edinburgh Review*.

more popularity than Voltaire, made dressmakers and duchesses weep, and earned about two hundred thousand pounds. Murray, the publisher, wrote to him: "I believe I might swear that I never experienced such unmixed pleasure as the reading of this exquisite work (first series of *Tales of my Landlord*) has afforded me. . . . Lord Holland said, when I asked his opinion: 'Opinion! we did not one of us go to bed last night —nothing slept but my gout.'"[1] In France, fourteen hundred thousand volumes of these novels were sold, and they continue to sell. The author, born in Edinburgh, was the son of a Writer to the Signet, learned in feudal law and ecclesiastical history, himself an advocate, a sheriff, and always fond of antiquities, especially national antiquities; so that by his family, education, by his own instincts, he found the materials for his works and the stimulus for his talent. His past recollections were impressed on him at the age of three, in a farm-house, where he had been taken to try the effect of bracing air on his little shrunken leg. He was wrapt naked in the warm skin of a sheep just killed, and he crept about in this attire, which passed for a specific. He continued to limp, and became a reader. From his infancy he listened to the stories which he afterwards gave to the public,—that of the battle of Culloden, of the cruelties practised on the Highlanders, the wars and sufferings of the Covenanters. At three he used to sing out the ballad of Hardyknute so loudly, that he prevented the village minister, a man gifted with a very fine voice, from being heard, and even from hearing himself. As soon as he had heard "a Border-raid

[1] Lockhart, *Life of Sir Walter Scott*, 10 vols., 2d ed., 1839, ii. ch. xxxvii. p. 170.

ballad," he knew it by heart. But in other things he was indolent, studied by fits and starts, and did not readily learn dry hard facts; yet for poetry, old songs, and ballads, the flow of his genius was precocious, swift, and invincible. The day on which he first opened, "under a platanus tree," the volumes in which Percy had collected the fragments of ancient poetry, he forgot dinner, "notwithstanding the sharp appetite of thirteen," and thenceforth he overwhelmed with these old rhymes not only his schoolfellows, but every one else who would listen to him. After he had become a clerk to his father, he crammed into his desk all the works of imagination which he could find. "The whole Jemmy and Jenny Jessamy tribe I abhorred," he said, "and it required the art of Burney, or the feeling of Mackenzie, to fix my attention upon a domestic tale. But all that was adventurous and romantic, . . . that touched upon knight-errantry, I devoured."[1] Having fallen ill, he was kept a long time in bed, forbidden to speak, with no other pleasure than to read the poets, novelists, historians, and geographers, illustrating the battle-descriptions by setting in line and disposing little pebbles, which represented the soldiers. Once cured, and able to walk well, he turned his walks to the same purpose, and developed a passion for the country, especially the historical regions. He said:

"But show me an old castle or a field of battle, and I was at home at once, filled it with its combatants in their proper costume, and overwhelmed my hearers by the enthusiasm of my description. In crossing Magus Moor, near St. Andrews, the spirit moved me to give a picture of the assassination of the Archbishop of St. Andrews to some fellow-travellers with whom

[1] Lockhart's *Life of Sir W. Scott*; Autobiography, i. 62.

I was accidentally associated, and one of them, though well acquainted with the story, protested my narrative had frightened away his night's sleep."[1]

Amidst other excursions, in search after knowledge, he travelled once every year during seven years in the wild district of Liddesdale, exploring every stream and every ruin, sleeping in the shepherds' huts, gleaning legends and ballads. We can judge from this of his antiquarian tastes and habits. He read provincial charters, the wretched middle-age Latin verses, the parish registers, even contracts and wills. The first time he was able to lay his hand on one of the great "old Border war-horns," he blew it all along his route. Rusty mail and dirty parchment attracted him, filled his head with recollections and poetry. In truth, he had a feudal mind, and always wished to be the founder of a distinct branch of an historical family. Literary glory was only secondary; his talent was to him only as an instrument. He spent the vast sums which his prose and verse had won, in building a castle in imitation of the ancient knights, "with a tall tower at either end, . . . sundry zigzagged gables, . . . a myriad of indentations and parapets, and machicollated eaves; most fantastic waterspouts; labelled windows, not a few of them painted glass; . . . stones carved with heraldries innumerable;"[2] apartments filled with sideboards and carved chests, adorned with "cuirasses, helmets, swords of every order, from the claymore and rapier to some German executioner's swords." For long years he held open house there, so to speak, and did to every stranger the "honours of Scotland," trying to revive the old

[1] Lockhart's *Life of Sir W. Scott*, Autobiography, i. 72.
[2] *Ibid.* vii.; Abbotsford in 1825.

feudal life, with all its customs and its display; dispensing liberal and joyous hospitality to all comers, above all to relatives, friends, and neighbours; singing ballads and sounding pibrochs amidst the clinking of glasses; holding gay hunting-parties, where the yeomen and gentlemen rode side by side; and encouraging lively dances, where the lord was not ashamed to give his hand to the miller's daughter. He himself, frank of speech, happy, amidst his forty guests, kept up the conversation with a profusion of stories, lavished from his vast memory and imagination, conducted his guests over his domain, extended at large cost, amidst new plantations whose future shade was to shelter his posterity; and he thought with a poet's smile of the distant generations who would acknowledge for their ancestor Sir Walter Scott, first baronet of Abbotsford.

The Lady of the Lake, Marmion, The Lord of the Isles, The Fair Maid of Perth, Old Mortality, Ivanhoe, Quentin Durward, who does not know these names by heart? From Walter Scott we learned history. And yet is this history? All these pictures of a distant age are false. Costumes, scenery, externals alone are exact; actions, speech, sentiments, all the rest is civilised, embellished, arranged in modern guise. We might suspect it when looking at the character and life of the author; for what does he desire, and what do the guests, eager to hear him, demand? Is he a lover of truth as it is, foul and fierce; an inquisitive explorer, indifferent to contemporary applause, bent alone on defining the transformations of living nature? By no means. He is in history, as he is at Abbotsford, bent on arranging points of view and Gothic halls. The moon will come in well there between the towers; here

is a nicely placed breastplate, the ray of light which it throws back is pleasant to see on these old hangings; suppose we took out the feudal garments from the wardrobe and invited the guests to a masquerade? The entertainment would be a fine one, in accordance with their reminiscences and their aristocratic principles. English lords, fresh from a bitter war against French democracy, ought to enter zealously into this commemoration of their ancestors. Moreover, there are ladies and young girls, and we must arrange the show, so as not to shock their severe morality and their delicate feelings, make them weep becomingly; not put on the stage overstrong passions, which they would not understand; on the contrary, select heroines to resemble them, always touching, but above all correct; young gentlemen, Evandale, Morton, Ivanhoe, irreproachably brought up, tender and grave, even slightly melancholic (it is the latest fashion), and worthy to lead them to the altar. Is there a man more suited than the author to compose such a spectacle? He is a good Protestant, a good husband, a good father, very moral, so decided a Tory that he carries off as a relic a glass from which the king has just drunk. In addition, he has neither talent nor leisure to reach the depths of his characters. He devotes himself to the exterior; he sees and describes forms and externals much more at length than inward feelings. Again, he treats his mind like a coal-mine, serviceable for quick working, and for the greatest possible gain: a volume in a month, sometimes in a fortnight even, and this volume is worth one thousand pounds. How should he discover, or how dare exhibit, the structure of barbarous souls? This structure is too difficult to discover, and too little

pleasing to show. Every two centuries, amongst men, the proportion of images and ideas, the mainspring of passions, the degree of reflection, the species of inclinations, change. Who, without a long preliminary training, now understands and relishes Dante, Rabelais, and Rubens? And how, for instance, could these great Catholic and mystical dreams, these vast temerities, or these impurities of carnal art, find entrance into the head of this gentlemanly citizen? Walter Scott pauses on the threshold of the soul, and in the vestibule of history, selects in the Renaissance and the Middle-age only the fit and agreeable, blots out plain spoken words, licentious sensuality, bestial ferocity. After all, his characters, to whatever age he transports them, are his neighbours, "cannie" farmers, vain lairds, gloved gentlemen, young marriageable ladies, all more or less commonplace, that is, steady; by their education and character at a great distance from the voluptuous fools of the Restoration, or the heroic brutes and fierce beasts of the Middle-age. As he has the greatest supply of rich costumes, and the most inexhaustible talent for scenic effect, he makes all his people get on very pleasantly, and composes tales which, in truth, have only the merit of fashion, though that fashion may last a hundred years yet.

That which he himself acted lasted for a shorter time. To sustain his princely hospitality and his feudal magnificence, he went into partnership with his printers; lord of the manor in public and merchant in private, he gave them his signature, without keeping a check over the use they made of it.[1] Bankruptcy

[1] If Constable's *Memorials* (3 vols. 1873) had been published when M. Taine wrote this portion of his work he perhaps would have seen

followed; at the age of fifty-five he was ruined, and one hundred and seventeen thousand pounds in debt. With admirable courage and uprightness he refused all favour, accepting nothing but time, set to work on the very day, wrote untiringly, in four years paid seventy thousand pounds, exhausted his brain so as to become paralytic, and to perish in the attempt. Neither in his conduct nor his literature did his feudal tastes succeed, and his manorial splendour was as fragile as his Gothic imaginations. He had relied on imitation, and we live by truth only; his glory is to be found elsewhere; there was something solid in his mind as well as in his writings. Beneath the lover of the Middle-age we find, first the "pawky" Scotchman, an attentive observer, whose sharpness became more intense by his familiarity with law; a good-natured man, easy and cheerful, as beseems the national character, so different from the English. One of his walking companions (Shortreed) said: "Eh me, sic an endless fund o' humour and drollery as he had wi' him! Never ten yards but we were either laughing or roaring and singing. Wherever we stopped, how brawlie he suited himsel' to everybody! He aye did as the lave did; never made himsel' the great man, or took ony airs in the company."[1] Grown older and graver, he was none the less amiable, the most agreeable of hosts, so that one of his guests, a farmer, I think, said to his wife, when home, after having been at Abbotsford, "Ailie, my woman, I'm ready for my bed . . . I

reason to alter this opinion, because it is clear that, so far from Sir Walter's printer and publisher ruining him, they, if not ruined by Sir Walter, were only equal sharers with him in the imprudences that led to the disaster.—TR.

[1] Lockhart's *Life*, i. ch. vii. 269.

wish I could sleep for a towmont, for there's only ae thing in this warld worth living for, and that's the Abbotsford hunt!"[1]

In addition to a mind of this kind, he had all-discerning eyes, an all-retentive memory, a ceaseless studiousness which comprehended the whole of Scotland, and all classes of people; and we see his true talent arise, so agreeable, so abundant and so easy, made up of minute observation and gentle raillery, recalling at once Teniers and Addison. Doubtless he wrote badly, at times in the worst possible manner:[2] it is clear that he dictated, hardly re-read his writing, and readily fell into a pasty and emphatic style,—a style very common in the present times, and which we read day after day in prospectuses and newspapers. What is worse, he is terribly long and diffuse; his conversations and descriptions are interminable; he is determined, at all events, to fill three volumes. But he has given to Scotland a citizenship of literature—I mean to the whole of Scotland: scenery, monuments, houses, cottages, characters of every age and condition, from the baron to the fisherman, from the advocate to the beggar, from the lady to the fishwife. When we mention merely his name they crowd forward; who does not see them coming from every niche of memory? The Baron of Bradwardine, Dominie Sampson, Meg Merrilies, the antiquary, Edie Ochiltree, Jeanie Deans and her father,—innkeepers, shopkeepers, old wives, an entire people.

[1] Lockhart's *Life*, vi. ch. xlix. 252.

[2] See the opening of *Ivanhoe*: "Such being our chief scene, the date of our story refers to a period towards the end of the reign of Richard I., when his return from his long captivity had become an event rather wished than hoped for by his despairing subjects, who were in the meantime subjected to every species of subordinate oppression." It is impossible to write in a heavier style.

What Scotch features are absent? Saving, patient, "cannie," and of course "pawky;" the poverty of the soil and the difficulty of existence has compelled them to be so: this is the specialty of the race. The same tenacity which they introduced into everyday affairs they have introduced into mental concerns,—studious readers and perusers of antiquities and controversies, poets also; legends spring up readily in a romantic land, amidst time-honoured wars and brigandism. In a land thus prepared, and in this gloomy clime, Presbyterianism sunk its sharp roots. Such was the real and modern world, lit up by the far-setting sun of chivalry, as Sir Walter Scott found it; like a painter who, passing from great show-pictures, finds interest and beauty in the ordinary houses of a paltry provincial town, or in a farm surrounded by beds of beetroots and turnips. A continuous archness throws its smile over these interior and *genre* pictures, so local and minute, and which, like the Flemish, indicate the rise of well-to-do citizens. Most of these good folk are comic. Our author makes fun of them, brings out their little deceits, parsimony, fooleries, vulgarity, and the hundred thousand ridiculous habits people always contract in a narrow sphere of life. A barber, in *The Antiquary*, moves heaven and earth about his wigs; if the French Revolution takes root everywhere, it was because the magistrates gave up this ornament. He cries out in a lamentable voice: "Haud a care, haud a care, Monkbarns! God's sake, haud a care!—Sir Arthur's drowned already, and an ye fa' over the cleugh too, there will be but ae wig left in the parish, and that's the minister's."[1] Mark how the author smiles, and

[1] Sir Walter Scott's Works, 48 vols., 1829; *The Antiquary*, ch. viii.

without malice: the barber's candid selfishness is the effect of the man's calling, and does not repel us. Walter Scott is never bitter; he loves men from the bottom of his heart, excuses or tolerates them; does not chastise vices, but unmasks them, and that not rudely. His greatest pleasure is to pursue at length, not indeed a vice, but a hobby; the mania for odds and ends in an antiquary, the archæological vanity of the Baron of Bradwardine, the aristocratic drivel of the Dowager Lady Bellenden,—that is, the amusing exaggeration of an allowable taste; and this without anger, because, on the whole, these ridiculous people are estimable, and even generous. Even in rogues like Dirk Hatteraick, in cut-throats like Bothwell, he allows some goodness. In no one, not even in Major Dalgetty, a professional murderer, a result of the thirty years' war, is the odious unveiled by the ridiculous. In this critical refinement and this benevolent philosophy, he resembles Addison.

He resembles him again by the purity and endurance of his moral principles. His amanuensis, Mr. Laidlaw, told him that he was doing great good by his attractive and noble tales, and that young people would no longer wish to look in the literary rubbish of the circulating libraries. When Walter Scott heard this, his eyes filled with tears: "On his deathbed he said to his son-in-law: 'Lockhart, I may have but a minute to speak to you. My dear, be a good man—be virtuous, be religious—be a good man. Nothing else will give you any comfort when you come to lie here.'"[1] This was almost his last word. By this fundamental honesty and this broad humanity, he was the Homer of modern

[1] Lockhart's *Life*, x. 217.

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citizen life. Around and after him, the novel of manners, separated from the historical romance, has produced a whole literature, and preserved the character which he stamped upon it. Miss Austen, Miss Brontë, Mrs. Gaskell, George Eliot, Bulwer, Thackeray, Dickens, and many others, paint, especially or entirely in his style, contemporary life, as it is, unembellished, in all ranks, often amongst the people, more frequently still amongst the middle class. And the causes which made the historical novel come to naught, in Scott and others, made the novel of manners, by the same authors, succeed. These men were too minute copyists and too decided moralists, incapable of the great divinations and the wide sympathies which unlock the door of history; their imagination was too literal, and their judgment too unwavering. It is precisely by these faculties that they created a new species of novel, which multiplies to this day in thousands of offshoots, with such abundance, that men of talent in this branch of literature may be counted by hundreds, and that we can only compare them, for their original and national spirit, to the great age of Dutch painting. Realistic and moral, these are their two features. They are far removed from the great imagination which creates and transforms, as it appeared in the Renaissance or in the seventeenth century, in the heroic or noble ages. They renounce free invention; they narrow themselves to scrupulous exactness; they paint with infinite detail costumes and places, changing nothing; they mark little shades of language; they are not disgusted by vulgarities or platitudes. Their information is authentic and precise. In short, they write like citizens for fellow-citizens, that is, for well-ordered people, members of a profession, whose imagination does not soar high,

and sees things through a magnifying glass, unable to relish anything in the way of a picture except interiors and make-believes. Ask a cook which picture she prefers in the Museum, and she will point to a kitchen, in which the stewpans are so well painted that a man is tempted to put soup and bread in them. Yet beyond this inclination, which is now European, Englishmen have a special craving, which with them is national and dates from the preceding century; they desire that the novel, like all other things, should contribute to their great work,—the amelioration of man and society. They ask from it the glorification of virtue, and the chastisement of vice. They send it into all the corners of civil society, and all the events of private history, in search of examples and expedients, to learn thence the means of remedying abuses, succouring miseries, avoiding temptations. They make of it an instrument of inquiry, education, and morality. A singular work, which has not its equal in all history, because in all history there has been no society like it, and which—of moderate attraction for lovers of the beautiful, admirable to lovers of the useful—offers, in the countless variety of its painting, and the invariable stability of its spirit, the picture of the only democracy which knows how to restrain, govern, and reform itself.

V.

Side by side with this development there was another, and with history philosophy entered into literature, in order to widen and modify it. It was manifest throughout, on the threshold as in the centre. On the threshold it had planted æsthetics: every poet, becoming theoretic, defined before producing the beautiful, laid

down principles in his preface, and originated only after a preconceived system. But the ascendency of metaphysics was much more visible yet in the middle of the work than on its threshold; for not only did it prescribe the form of poetry, but it furnished it with its elements. What is man, and what has he come into the world to do? What is this far-off greatness to which he aspires? Is there a haven which he may reach, and a hidden hand to conduct him thither? These are the questions which poets, transformed into thinkers, agreed to agitate; and Goethe, here as elsewhere the father and promoter of all lofty modern ideas, at once sceptical, pantheistic, and mystic, wrote in *Faust* the epic of the age and the history of the human mind. Need I say that in Schiller, Heine, Beethoven, Victor Hugo, Lamartine, and de Musset, the poet, in his individual person, always speaks the words of the universal man? The characters which they have created, from *Faust* to *Ruy Blas*, only served them to exhibit some grand metaphysical and social idea; and twenty times this too great idea, bursting its narrow envelope, broke out beyond all human likelihood and all poetic form, to display itself to the eyes of the spectators. Such was the domination of the philosophical spirit, that, after doing violence to literature, or rendering it rigid, it imposed on music humanitarian ideas, inflicted on painting symbolical designs, penetrated current speech, and marred style by an overflow of abstractions and formulas, from which all our efforts now fail to liberate us. As an overstrong child, which at its birth injures its mother, so it has contorted the noble forms which had endeavoured to contain it, and dragged literature through an agony of struggles and sufferings.

This philosophical spirit was not born in England, and from Germany to England the passage was very long. For a considerable time it appeared dangerous or ridiculous. One of the reviews stated even, that Germany was a large country peopled by hussars and classical scholars; that if folks go there, they will see at Heidelberg a very large tun, and could feast on excellent Rhine wine and Westphalian ham, but that their authors were very heavy and awkward, and that a sentimental German resembles a tall and stout butcher crying over a killed calf. If at length German literature found entrance, first by the attraction of extravagant dramas and fantastic ballads, then by the sympathy of the two nations, which, allied against French policy and civilisation, acknowledged their cousinship in speech, religion, and blood, German metaphysics did not enter, unable to overturn the barrier which a positive mind and a national religion opposed to it. It tried to pass, with Coleridge for instance, a philosophical theologian and dreamy poet, who toiled to widen conventional dogma, and who, at the close of his life, having become a sort of oracle, endeavoured, in the pale of the Church, to unfold and unveil before a few faithful disciples the Christianity of the future. It did not make head; the English mind was too positive, the theologians too enslaved. It was constrained to transform itself and become Anglican, or to deform itself and become revolutionary; and to produce a Wordsworth, a Byron, a Shelley, instead of a Schiller and Goethe.

The first, Wordsworth, a new Cowper, with less talent and more ideas than the other, was essentially a man of inner feelings, that is, engrossed by the concerns of the soul. Such men ask what they have come to do

in this world, and why life has been given to them; if they are right or wrong, and if the secret movements of their heart are conformable to the supreme law, without taking into account the visible causes of their conduct. Such, for men of this kind, is the master conception which renders them serious, meditative, and as a rule gloomy.[1] They live with eyes turned inwards, not to mark and classify their ideas, like physiologists, but as moralists, to approve or blame their feelings. Thus understood, life becomes a grave business, of uncertain issue, on which we must incessantly and scrupulously reflect. Thus understood, the world changes its aspect; it is no longer a machine of wheels working into each other, as the philosopher says, nor a splendid blooming plant, as the artist feels,—it is the work of a moral being, displayed as a spectacle to moral beings.

Figure such a man facing life and the world; he sees them, and takes part in it, apparently like any one else; but how different is he in reality! His great thought pursues him; and when he beholds a tree, it is to meditate on human destiny. He finds or lends a sense to the least objects: a soldier marching to the sound of the drum makes him reflect on heroic sacrifice, the support of societies; a train of clouds lying heavily on the verge of a gloomy sky, endues him with that melancholy calm, so suited to nourish moral life. There is nothing which does not recall him to his duty and admonish him of his origin. Near or far, like a great mountain in a landscape, his philosophy will appear behind all his ideas and images. If he is restless, im-

[1] The Jansenists, the Puritans and the Methodists are the extremes of this class.

passioned, sick with scruples, it will appear to him amidst storm and lightning, as it did to the genuine Puritans, to Cowper, Pascal, Carlyle. It will appear to him in a greyish kind of fog, imposing and calm, if he enjoys, like Wordsworth, a calm mind and a quiet life. Wordsworth was a wise and happy man, a thinker and a dreamer, who read and walked. He was from the first in tolerably easy circumstances, and had a small fortune. Happily married, amidst the favours of government and the respect of the public, he lived peacefully on the margin of a beautiful lake, in sight of noble mountains, in the pleasant retirement of an elegant house, amidst the admiration and attentions of distinguished and chosen friends, engrossed by contemplations which no storm came to distract, and by poetry which was produced without any hindrance. In this deep calm he listens to his own thoughts; the peace was so great, within him and around him, that he could perceive the imperceptible. "To me, the meanest flower that blows, can give Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears." He saw a grandeur, a beauty, a teaching in the trivial events which weave the woof of our most commonplace days. He needed not, for the sake of emotion, either splendid sights or unusual actions. The dazzling glare of lamps, the pomp of the theatre, would have shocked him; his eyes were too delicate, accustomed to quiet and uniform tints. He was a poet of the twilight. Moral existence in commonplace existence, such was his object—the object of his choice. His paintings are cameos with a grey ground, which have a meaning; designedly he suppresses all which might please the senses, in order to speak solely to the heart.

Out of this character sprang a theory,—his theory of art, altogether spiritualistic, which, after repelling classical habits, ended by rallying Protestant sympathies, and won for him as many partisans as it had raised enemies.[1] Since the only important thing is moral life, let us devote ourselves solely to nourishing it. The reader must be moved, genuinely, with profit to his soul; the rest is indifferent: let us, then, show him objects moving in themselves, without dreaming of clothing them in a beautiful style. Let us strip ourselves of conventional language and poetic diction. Let us neglect noble words, scholastic and courtly epithets, and all the pomp of factitious splendour, which the classical writers thought themselves bound to assume, and justified in imposing. In poetry, as elsewhere, the grand question is, not ornament, but truth. Let us leave show, and seek effect. Let us speak in a bare style, as like as possible to prose, to ordinary conversation, even to rustic conversation, and let us choose our subjects at hand, in humble life. Let us take for our characters an idiot boy, a shivering old peasant woman, a hawker, a servant stopping in the street. It is the truth of sentiment, not the dignity of the folks, which makes the beauty of a subject; it is the truth of sentiment, not dignity of the words, which makes the beauty of poetry. What matters that it is a villager who weeps, if these tears enable me to see the maternal sentiment? What matters that my verse is a line of rhymed prose, if this line displays a noble emotion? Men read that they may carry away emotion, not phrases; they come to us to look for moral culture, not pretty ways of speaking. And thereupon Wordsworth,

[1] See the preface of his second edition of *Lyrical Ballads*.

classifying his poems according to the different faculties of men and the different ages of life, undertakes to lead us through all compartments and degrees of inner education, to the convictions and sentiments which he has himself attained.

All this is very well, but on condition that the reader is in Wordsworth's position; that is, essentially a philosophical moralist, and an excessively sensitive man. When I shall have emptied my head of all worldly thoughts, and looked up at the clouds for ten years to refine my soul, I shall love this poetry. Meanwhile the web of imperceptible threads by which Wordsworth endeavours to bind together all sentiments and embrace all nature, breaks in my fingers; it is too fragile; it is a woof of woven spider-web, spun by a metaphysical imagination, and tearing as soon as a hand of flesh and blood tries to touch it. Half of his pieces are childish, almost foolish;[1] dull events described in a dull style, one platitude after another, and that on principle. All the poets in the world would not reconcile us to so much tedium. Certainly a cat playing with three dry leaves may furnish a philosophical reflection, and figure forth a wise man sporting with the fallen leaves of life; but eighty lines on such a subject make us yawn—much worse, smile. At this rate we will find a lesson in an old tooth-brush, which still continues in use. Doubtless, also, the ways of Providence are not to be fathomed, and a selfish and brutal artisan like Peter Bell may be converted by the beautiful conduct of an ass full of fidelity and unselfishness; but this sentimental prettiness quickly grows insipid, and the style, by its factitious simplicity,

[1] *Peter Bell; The White Doe; The Kitten and Falling Leaves*, etc.

renders it still more insipid. We are not over-pleased to see a grave man seriously imitate the language of nurses, and we murmur to ourselves that, with so many emotions, he must wet so many handkerchiefs. We will acknowledge, if you like, that your sentiments are interesting; yet there is no need to trot them all out before us.

We imagine we hear him say: "Yesterday I read Walton's *Complete Angler;* let us write a sonnet about it. On Easter Sunday I was in a valley in Westmoreland; another sonnet. Two days ago I put too many questions to my little boy and caused him to tell a lie; a poem. I am going to travel on the Continent and through Scotland; poems about all the incidents, monuments, adventures of the journey."

You must consider your emotions very precious, that you put them all under glass! There are only three or four events in each of our lives worthy of being related; our powerful sensations deserve to be exhibited, because they recapitulate our whole existence; but not the little effects of the little agitations which pass through us, and the imperceptible oscillations of our everyday condition. Else I might end by explaining in rhyme that yesterday my dog broke his leg, and that this morning my wife put on her stockings inside out. The specialty of the artist is to cast great ideas in moulds as great; Wordsworth's moulds are of bad common clay, cracked, unable to hold the noble metal which they ought to contain.

But the metal is really noble; and besides several very beautiful sonnets, there is now and then a work, amongst others his largest, *The Excursion*, in which we forget the poverty of the getting up to admire the purity

and elevation of the thought. In truth, the author hardly puts himself to the trouble of imagining; he walks along and converses with a pious Scotch pedlar: this is the whole of the story. The poets of this school always walk, look at nature and think of human destiny; it is their permanent attitude. He converses, then, with the pedlar, a meditative character, who has been educated by a long experience of men and things, who speaks very well (too well!) of the soul and of God, and relates to him the history of a good woman who died of grief in her cottage; then he meets a solitary, a sort of sceptical Hamlet—morose, made gloomy by the death of his family, and the disappointments suffered during his long journeyings; then a clergyman, who took them to the village churchyard, and described to them the life of several interesting people who are buried there. Observe that, just in proportion as reflections and moral discussions arise, and as scenery and moral descriptions spread before us in hundreds, so also dissertations entwine their long thorny hedgerows, and metaphysical thistles multiply in every corner. In short, the poem is as grave and dull as a sermon. And yet, in spite of this ecclesiastical air and the tirades against Voltaire and his age,[1] we feel ourselves impressed as by a discourse of Théodore Jouffroy. After all, Wordsworth is convinced; he has spent his life meditating on these kinds of ideas, they are the poetry of his religion, race, climate; he is imbued with them; his pictures, stories, interpretations of visible nature and human life tend only to put the

[1] This dull product of a scoffer's pen
Impure conceits discharging from a heart
Hardened by impious pride!

Wordsworth's Works, 7 vols. 1849; *The Excursion*, book 2; *The Solitary*.

mind in a grave disposition which is proper to the inner man. I enter here as in the valley of Port Royal: a solitary nook, stagnant waters, gloomy woods, ruins, gravestones, and above all the idea of responsible man, and the obscure beyond, to which we involuntarily move. I forget the careless French fashions, the custom of not disturbing the even tenor of life. There is an imposing seriousness, an austere beauty in this sincere reflection; we begin to feel respect, we stop and are moved. This book is like a Protestant temple, august, though bare and monotonous. The poet sets forth the great interests of the soul:

"On Man, on Nature, and on Human Life,
Musing in solitude, I oft perceive
Fair trains of imagery before me rise,
Accompanied by feelings of delight
Pure, or with no unpleasing sadness mixed;
And I am conscious of affecting thoughts
And dear remembrances, whose presence soothes
Or elevates the Mind, intent to weigh
The good and evil of our mortal state.
—To these emotions, whencesoe'er they come,
Whether from breath of outward circumstance,
Or from the Soul—an impulse to herself,—
I would give utterance in numerous verse.
Of Truth, of Grandeur, Beauty, Love, and Hope,
And melancholy Fear subdued by Faith;
Of blessed consolations in distress;
Of moral strength, and intellectual Power;
Of joy in widest commonalty spread;
Of the individual Mind that keeps her own
Inviolate retirement, subject there
To Conscience only, and the law supreme
Of that Intelligence which governs all—
I sing."[1]

[1] Wordsworth's Works, 7 vols. 1849, vii.; *The Excursion*. Preface. 11.

This intelligence, the only holy part of man, is holy in all stages; for this, Wordsworth selects as his characters a pedlar, a parson, villagers; in his eyes rank, education, habits, all the worldly envelope of a man, is without interest; what constitutes our worth is the integrity of our conscience; science itself is only profound when it penetrates moral life; for this life fails nowhere:

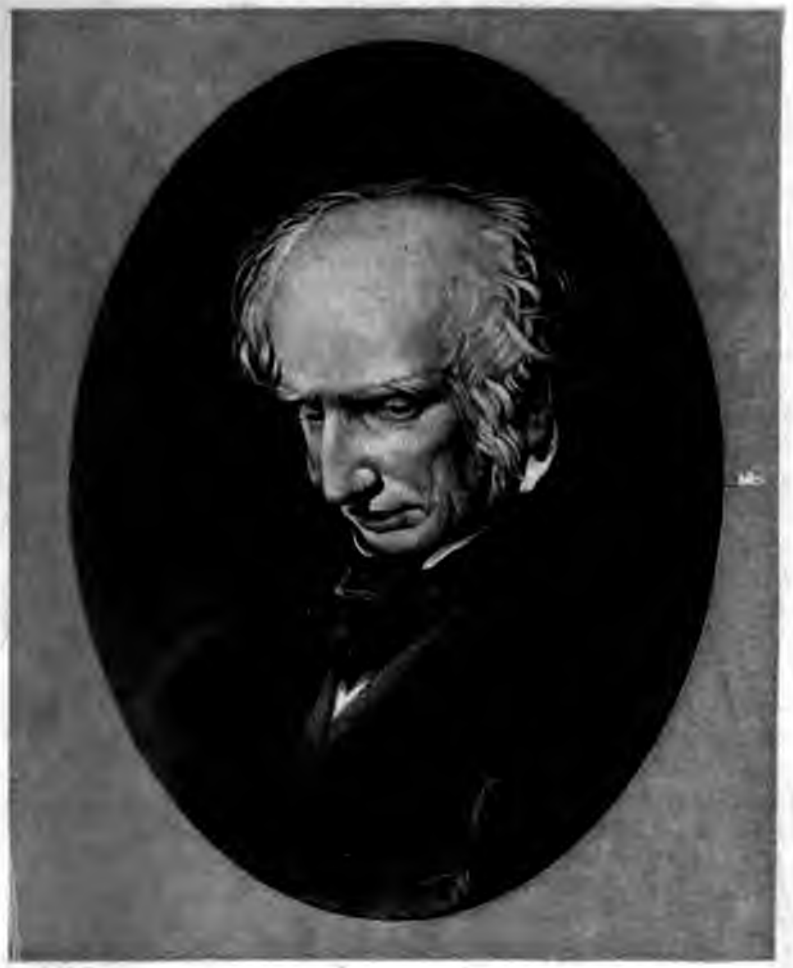
> "To every Form of being is assigned . . .
> An *active* principle:—howe'er removed
> From sense and observation, it subsists
> In all things, in all natures; in the stars
> Of azure heaven, the unenduring clouds,
> In flower and tree, in every pebbly stone
> That paves the brooks, the stationary rocks,
> The moving waters, and the invisible air.
> Whate'er exists hath properties that spread
> Beyond itself, communicating good,
> A simple blessing, or with evil mixed;
> Spirit that knows no insulated spot,
> No chasm, no solitude; from link to link
> It circulates, the Soul of all the worlds."[1]

Reject, then, with disdain this arid science:

> "Where Knowledge, ill begun in cold remarks
> On outward things, with formal inference ends;
> Or, if the mind turn inward, she recoils,
> At once—or, not recoiling, is perplexed—[2]
> Lost in a gloom of uninspired research. . . .
> Viewing all objects unremittingly
> In disconnexion dead and spiritless;

[1] Wordsworth's Works, 7 vols. 1849, vii. book 9; *Discourse of the Wanderer*, opening verses, 315.

[2] *Ibid.*, vii.; *The Excursion*, book 4; *Despondency Corrected*, 137.



WILLIAM WORDSWORTH

And still dividing, and dividing still,
Breaks down all grandeur."[1]

Beyond the vanities of science and the pride of the world, there is the soul, whereby all are equal, and the broad and inner Christian life opens at once its gates to all who would enter:

"The sun is fixed,
And the infinite magnificence of heaven
Fixed within reach of every human eye.
The sleepless Ocean murmurs for all ears,
The vernal field infuses fresh delight
Into all hearts. . . .
The primal duties shine aloft like stars,
The charities that soothe and heal and bless
Are scattered at the feet of man—like flowers."

So, at the end of all agitation and all search appears the great truth, which is the abstract of the rest:

"Life, I repeat, is energy of love
Divine or human; exercised in pain,
In strife and tribulation; and ordained,
If so approved and sanctified, to pass,
Through shades and silent rest to endless joy."[2]

The verses sustain these serious thoughts by their grave harmony, as a motet accompanies meditation or prayer. They resemble the grand and monotonous music of the organ, which in the eventide, at the close of the service, rolls slowly in the twilight of arches and pillars.

When a certain phase of human intelligence comes

[1] Wordsworth's Works, 7 vols. 1849, vii.; *The Excursion*, book 4; *Despondency Corrected*, 149.

[2] *Ibid.* last lines of book 5, *The Pastor*, 20.

to light, it does so from all sides; there is no part where it does not appear, no instincts which it does not renew. It enters simultaneously the two opposite camps, and seems to undo with one hand what it has made with the other. If it is, as it was formerly, the oratorical style, we find it at the same time in the service of cynical misanthropy, and in that of decorous humanity, in Swift and in Addison. If it is, as now, the philosophical spirit, it produces at once conservative harangues and socialistic utopias, Wordsworth and Shelley.[1] The latter, one of the greatest poets of the age, son of a rich baronet, beautiful as an angel, of extraordinary precocity, gentle, generous, tender, overflowing with all the gifts of heart, mind, birth, and fortune, marred his life, as it were, wantonly, by allowing his conduct to be guided by an enthusiastic imagination which he should have kept for his verses. From his birth he had "the vision" of sublime beauty and happiness; and the contemplation of an ideal world set him in arms against the real. Having refused at Eton to be a fag of the big boys, he was treated by boys and masters with a revolting cruelty; suffered himself to be made a martyr, refused to obey, and, falling back into forbidden studies, began to form the most immoderate and most poetical dreams. He judged society by the oppression which he underwent, and man by the generosity which he felt in himself; thought that man was good, and society bad, and that it was only necessary to suppress established institutions to make earth "a paradise." He became a republican, a communist, preached fraternity, love, even abstinence from flesh, and as a means the abolition of

[1] See also the novels of Godwin, *Caleb Williams*, and others.

kings, priests, and God.[1] We can fancy the indignation which such ideas roused in a society so obstinately attached to established order—so intolerant, in which, above the conservative and religious instincts, Cant spoke like a master. Shelley was expelled from the university; his father refused to see him; the Lord Chancellor, by a decree, took from him, as being unworthy, the custody of his two children; finally, he was obliged to quit England. I forgot to say that at eighteen he married a young girl of inferior rank, that they separated, that she committed suicide, that he undermined his health by his excitement and suffering,[2] and that to the end of his life he was nervous or ill. Is not this the life of a genuine poet? Eyes fixed on the splendid apparitions with which he peopled space, he went through the world not seeing the high road, stumbling over the stones of the roadside. He possessed not that knowledge of life which most poets share in common with novelists. Seldom has a mind been seen in which thought soared in loftier regions, and more removed from actual things. When he tried to create characters and events—in *Queen Mab*, in *Alastor*, in *The Revolt of Islam*, in *Prometheus*—he only produced unsubstantial phantoms. Once only, in the *Cenci*, did he inspire a living figure (Beatrice) worthy of Webster or old Ford; but in some sort this was in spite of himself, and because in it the sentiments were so unheard of and so strained that they suited superhuman conceptions. Elsewhere his world is throughout

[1] *Queen Mab*, and notes. At Oxford Shelley issued a kind of thesis, calling it "On the Necessity of Atheism."

[2] Some time before his death, when he was twenty-nine, he said, "If I die now, I shall have lived as long as my father."

beyond our own. The laws of life are suspended or transformed. We move in Shelley's world between heaven and earth, in abstraction, dreamland, symbolism: the beings float in it like those fantastic figures which we see in the clouds, and which alternately undulate and change form capriciously, in their robes of snow and gold.

For souls thus constituted, the great consolation is nature. They are too finely sensitive to find amusement in the spectacle and picture of human passions. Shelley instinctively avoided that spectacle; the sight re-opened his own wounds. He was happier in the woods, at the sea-side, in contemplation of grand landscapes. The rocks, clouds, and meadows, which to ordinary eyes seem dull and insensible, are, to a wide sympathy, living and divine existences, which are an agreeable change from men. No virgin smile is so charming as that of the dawn, nor any joy more triumphant than that of the ocean when its waves swell and shimmer, as far as the eye can reach, under the lavish splendour of heaven. At this sight the heart rises unwittingly to the sentiment of ancient legends, and the poet perceives in the inexhaustible bloom of things the peaceful soul of the great mother by whom everything grows and is supported. Shelley spent most of his life in the open air, especially in his boat; first on the Thames, then on the Lake of Geneva, then on the Arno, and in the Italian waters. He loved desert and solitary places, where man enjoys the pleasure of believing infinite what he sees, infinite as his soul. And such was this wide ocean, and this shore more barren than its waves. This love was a deep Teutonic instinct, which, allied to pagan emotions, produced his

poetry, pantheistic and yet full of thought, almost Greek and yet English, in which fancy plays like a foolish, dreamy child, with the splendid skein of forms and colours. A cloud, a plant, a sunrise,—these are his characters: they were those of the primitive poets, when they took the lightning for a bird of fire, and the clouds for the flocks of heaven. But what a secret ardour beyond these splendid images, and how we feel the heat of the furnace beyond the coloured phantoms, which it sets afloat over the horizon![1] Has any one since Shakspeare and Spenser lighted on such tender and such grand ecstasies? Has any one painted so magnificently the cloud which watches by night in the sky, enveloping in its net the swarm of golden bees, the stars:

> "The sanguine sunrise, with his meteor eyes,
> And his burning plumes outspread,
> Leaps on the back of my sailing rack,
> When the morning star shines dead . . .[2]
> That orbed maiden with white fire laden,
> Whom mortals call the moon,
> Glides glimmering o'er my fleece-like floor,
> By the midnight breezes strewn."[3]

Read again those verses on the garden, in which the sensitive plant dreams. Alas! they are the dreams of the poet, and the happy visions which floated in his virgin heart up to the moment when it opened out and withered. I will pause in time; I will not proceed, as he did, beyond the recollections of his spring-time:

[1] See in Shelley's Works, 1853, *The Witch of Atlas*, *The Cloud*, *To a Sky-lark*, the end of *The Revolt of Islam*, *Alastor*, and the whole of *Prometheus*.

[2] *The Cloud*, c. iii. 502.

[3] *Ibid.* c. iv. 503.

"The snowdrop, and then the violet,
Arose from the ground with warm rain wet,
And their breath was mixed with fresh odour, sent
From the turf, like the voice and the instrument.

Then the pied wind-flowers and the tulip tall,
And narcissi, the fairest among them all,
Who gaze on their eyes in the stream's recess,
Till they die of their own dear loveliness.

And the Naiad-like lily of the vale,
Whom youth makes so fair and passion so pale,
That the light of its tremulous bells is seen
Through their pavilions of tender green;

And the hyacinth purple, and white, and blue,
Which flung from its bells a sweat peal anew
Of music so delicate, soft, and intense,
It was felt like an odour within the sense;

And the rose like a nymph to the bath addrest,
Which unveiled the depth of her glowing breast,
Till, fold after fold, to the fainting air
The soul of her beauty and love lay bare;

And the wand-like lily, which lifted up,
As a Mænad, its moonlight-coloured cup,
Till the fiery star, which is its eye,
Gazed through the clear dew on the tender sky . . .

And on the stream whose inconstant bosom
Was prankt, under boughs of embowering blossom,
With golden and green light, slanting through
Their heaven of many a tangled hue,

Broad water-lilies lay tremulously,
And starry river-buds glimmered by,
And around them the soft stream did glide and dance
With a motion of sweet sound and radiance.

And the sinuous paths of lawn and of moss,
Which led through the garden along and across,
Some open at once to the sun and the breeze,
Some lost among bowers of blossoming trees,

Were all paved with daisies and delicate bells,
As fair as the fabulous asphodels,
And flowerets which drooping as day drooped too,
Fell into pavilions, white, purple, and blue,
To roof the glow-worm from the evening dew."[1]

Everything lives here, everything breathes and yearns for something. This poem, the story of a plant, is also the story of a soul—Shelley's soul, the sensitive. Is it not natural to confound them? Is there not a community of nature amongst all the dwellers in this world? Verily there is a soul in everything; in the universe is a soul; be the existence what it will, uncultured or rational, defined or vague, ever beyond its sensible form shines a secret essence and something divine, which we catch sight of by sublime illuminations, never reaching or penetrating it. It is this presentiment and yearning which sustains all modern poetry,—now in Christian meditations, as with Campbell and Wordsworth, now in pagan visions, as with Keats and Shelley. They hear the great heart of nature beat; they wish to reach it; they try all spiritual and sensible approaches, through Judea and through Greece, by consecrated doctrines and by proscribed dogmas. In this splendid and fruitless effort the greatest become exhausted and die. Their poetry, which they drag with them over these sublime tracks, is torn to pieces. One alone, Byron, attains the summit; and of all these

[1] Shelley's Works, 1853, *The Sensitive Plant*, 490.

grand poetic draperies, which float like banners, and seem to summon men to the conquest of supreme truth, we see now but tatters scattered by the wayside.

Yet these men did their work. Under their multiplied efforts, and by their unconscious working together, the idea of the beautiful is changed, and other ideas change by contagion. Conservatives contribute to it as well as revolutionaries, and the new spirit breathes through the poems which bless and those which curse Church and State. We learn from Wordsworth and Byron, by profound Protestantism [1] and confirmed scepticism, that in this sacred cant-defended establishment there is matter for reform or for revolt; that we may discover moral merits other than those which the law tickets and opinion accepts; that beyond conventional confessions there are truths; that beyond respected social conditions there are grandeurs; that beyond regular positions there are virtues; that greatness is in the heart and the genius; and all the rest, actions and beliefs, are subaltern. We have just seen that beyond literary conventionalities there is a poetry, and consequently we are disposed to feel that beyond religious dogmas there may be a faith, and beyond social institutions a justice. The old edifice totters, and the Revolution enters, not by a sudden inundation, as in France, but by slow infiltration. The wall built up against it by public intolerance cracks and opens: the war waged against Jacobinism, republican and imperial, ends in victory; and henceforth we may regard opposing ideas, not as opposing enemies, but as ideas. We regard them,

[1] Our life is turned out of her course, whenever man is made an offering, a sacrifice, a tool, or implement, a passive thing employed as a brute mean."—Wordsworth, *The Excursion.*

LORD THOMAS BABINGTON MACAULAY

and, accommodating them to the different countries, we import them. Roman Catholics are enfranchised, rotten boroughs abolished, the electoral franchise lowered; unjust taxes, which kept up the price of corn, are repealed; ecclesiastical tithes changed into rent-charges; the terrible laws protecting property are modified, the assessment of taxes brought more and more on the rich classes; old institutions, formerly established for the advantage of a race, and in this race of a class, are only maintained when for the advantage of all classes; privileges become functions; and in this triumph of the middle class, which shapes opinion and assumes the ascendency, the aristocracy, passing from sinecures to services, seems now legitimate only as a national nursery, kept up to furnish public men. At the same time narrow orthodoxy is enlarged. Zoology, astronomy, geology, botany, anthropology, all the sciences of observation, so much cultivated and so popular, forcibly introduce their dissolvent discoveries. Criticism comes in from Germany, re-handles the bible, re-writes the history of dogma, attacks dogma itself. Meanwhile poor Scottish philosophy is dried up. Amidst the agitations of sects, endeavouring to transform each other, and rising Unitarianism, we hear at the gates of the sacred ark the continental philosophy roaring like a tide. Now already it has reached literature: for fifty years all great writers have plunged into it,—Sydney Smith, by his sarcasms against the numbness of the clergy, and the oppression of the Catholics; Arnold, by his protests against the religious monoply of the clergy, and the ecclesiastical monopoly of the Anglicans; Macaulay, by his history and panegyric of the liberal revolution, Thackeray, by attacking the

nobles, in the interests of the middle class; Dickens, by attacking dignitaries and wealthy men, in the interests of the lowly and poor; Currer Bell and Mrs. Browning, by defending the initiative and independence of women; Stanley and Jowett, by introducing the German exegesis, and by giving precision to biblical criticism; Carlyle, by importing German metaphysics in an English form; Stuart Mill, by importing French positivism in an English form; Tennyson himself, by extending over the beauties of all lands and all ages the protection of his amiable dilettantism and his poetical sympathies,—each according to his power and his difference of position; all retained within reach of the shore by their practical prejudices, all strengthened against falling by their moral prejudices; all bent, some with more of eagerness, others with more of distrust, in welcoming or giving entrance to the growing tide of modern democracy and philosophy in State and Church, without doing damage, and gradually, so as to destroy nothing, and to make everything bear fruit.

END OF VOL. III.